

Belmont

HERMIONE,

OR THE

ORPHAN SISTERS.

A NOVEL.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR WILLIAM LANE,

AT THE

Minerva

LEADENHALL-STREET.

M. DCC. XCI.

THE BIRMINGHAM

OF THE

ORPHEAN SISTERS

A NOVEL

VOL. III

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PRINTED FOR WILLIAM LANE,

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ROBINSON

LEARNHAM STREET,

W. L. & CO.



Frank Richards

HERMIONE.

LETTER XIII.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

FEB. 20.

I COULD not contrive to meet with Mr. Howard till dinner was announced, at which he seemed absent and absorbed; but as I then sat next him, I asked him to allow me to talk with him when we left the table.

It is just the request I was going to make, said he: and when the ladies retired to tea and coffee, under pretence of business he made his excuses to the gentlemen and joined me in Mrs. Hindon's dressing room.

No time is to be lost, dear Sir, said I to him the moment he entered, in chang-

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ing our abode. The sooner the alteration in our circumstances takes place, the sooner shall we be enabled to conquer that reluctance which it must at first occasion. We have been unwillingly constrained, from a cruel peculiarity in our fate, to prove a burthen on the humanity of our friends too long. I will not wound your delicacy by touching on the unspeakable obligations under which you have laid us, and for which simple gratitude is I fear all the return that will ever be allowed us to testify; that however you may be assured is warm from our hearts, and never can be effaced from our remembrance: but your sister, Mrs. Hindon, we have incommoded greatly too long. I have been considering many different plans, continued I; but as a strict economy must be the basis of all our schemes, and that is in fact an art I have yet to learn, it is not easy to fix; neither, from my short residence in this country, am I
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an adequate judge of the safety or propriety of any step, without asking the advice and assistance of that friend whom Fate has left us. Do you imagine however, without being too lavish of your trouble, that a reputable family might be found who would consent immediately to receive us for a moderate sum, till that mode of life can be clearly ascertained of which our finances will hereafter allow.

Perhaps there might, said he. But surely Miss Seymour you do not think of removing immediately.

You do not seem to approve of this scheme, cried I, finding he said nothing more and seemed buried in thought. Is there any other you would advise?

Ah, Miss Seymour! cried he at last; there is a scheme—but I tremble to mention it.

At these words his face was overspread with a confusion which covered mine with blushes. The seriousness of his

B 2 manner,

manner, the embarrassment that had seized him, and an unusual expression of softness in his countenance, altogether infused suspicions into my mind of the most distressing nature: but Mr. Howard instantly recovered his dignity, and taking my hand with a benevolent smile, as if he had really penetrated into my thoughts and read my apprehensions.--Be not alarmed, said he; presumptuous my secret wishes perhaps once were, but I have been long sensible of their utter impropriety; and the conviction that they never could be crowned with success has long since nipped them in the bud. It is indeed a plan on which the whole happiness of my future life depends, but of which I now confess to you your lovely sister is the object.

Situated as I was, continued he, (for I knew not what reply to make) an inmate for months in your family, under the title of your father's friend, I enjoyed
a dangerous

a dangerous intimacy to which no other man had access. The snare, even at forty three, was not to be avoided; for where the mind and form both equally conspire to charm and seduce, no age is exempted from feeling their united force. Against such there is no defence, and one only cure; for where hope is completely extinguished passion seldom continues to torment. In this case it often changes both its nature and its name, and meliorating into a tender friendship, constitutes a less selfish gratification instead of proving the misery of our lives.

This, Miss Seymour, has been exactly my case. My efforts however to escape from one danger have led me into another no less insinuating. Tho' I intreat you to believe me, when I solemnly declare that I never was for one moment either so mad or so interested as to wish for my own enjoyment at the price of your amiable sister's prosperity; nor

while her future prospects seemed favorable, and her situation in life promised to prove almost equal to her merits, should any consideration on earth have induced me to make known my present presumption. I should have had then no remaining wish but for her happiness and success in every pursuit. The disappointment of my wishes as to the latter, has however given birth to hopes that the first is not still unattainable, and induced me to flatter myself that should she deign to allow of my most zealous endeavours to contribute to it, it may not prove beyond my power in some measure to console her for what she has lost.

Do not however imagine, that I shall so far descend from my age and character as to be offended by a refusal. An admirer at my time of life must not pretend to assume the lover of twenty. I am aware of the great inequality of our years, and of many other objections your
sister

sister may feel, and the force of which she may not be able to surmount. If however she thinks, after consulting with you, that there are any advantages to compensate these obstacles, if the warmest attachment and the most unbounded indulgence, if my legal protection, and the command of a fortune much too narrow, alas ! for her pretensions and almost beneath her acceptance, yet with which I flatter myself a mind like her's could be contented ;—if these circumstances weigh in any degree against the opposite scale, I must so far adopt the language of a lover as to declare that she will literally render me the happiest of men. I shall receive her hand as a fresh blessing from heaven, and regard it as a condescension for which I shall ever consider myself her debtor.

Some hints in this speech of Mr. Howard's had confused me so extremely, that I made no attempt to answer or interrupt

him, except by bowing my head in acknowledgment of the compliments he paid me. Finding however that he now expected a reply, I thanked him in my sister's name for the honour of his good opinion; as to what success his proposal might receive, I declared myself wholly ignorant; grateful she cannot fail to prove, said I, but what lengths that sentiment may carry her, I am unable to conjecture.

If Miss Fanny, said he, elated with the gay hopes and lively prospects of youth, should think with reluctance on uniting herself to a man whose age corresponds so ill with her own, I must regret with fervor, but never shall repine at her determination. There is one obstacle however, Miss Seymour, which severely damps my feeble hopes, and is indeed the circumstance that has induced me to open my intentions first to you, as it is a particular in which I imagine you can
fully

fully satisfy me, and on which it solely depends whether I shall immediately mention this interesting subject to your sister, or be silent on it for ever. I have remarked, since her abode here, that your sister has had a very zealous admirer, who cannot have failed I imagine in profiting from the many opportunities he has enjoyed of soliciting her favor.

Of Captain Wilmot, cried I, you need have no apprehensions. I hope you do Fanny the justice to believe that the assiduities of such a rival are by no means formidable.

He possesses at least youth and good looks in his favour, replied Mr. Howard; but you relieve my mind from a weight of painful anxiety, as this is a bar which must not only have proved wholly insurmountable, but one of those to obviate which I could not even have attempted; for though I shall not expect the heart of my mistress, I must possess a

B 5

certain

certain degree of her attachment ; a wish to please, and a willingness to be pleased, on which to build my hopes of gaining the affections of my wife : without this I should be myself miserable, nor would it be in my power to render her happy.

If she cannot compleatly bestow her heart, my dear Sir, cried I, may she likewise withhold her hand. But I am certain my sister is too sensible of the value of your's, to trifle with a proposal so generous and disinterested. If—for our affections are not always in our own power, and the caprice of taste is but too often at variance with reason and judgment—if she cannot make a proper return, I am certain you have too much delicacy to wish her your's and too much good sense to be offended.

Offended ! Miss Seymour: be assured I never shall be offended ; and believe me, hardly surprised.

As Mr. Howard pronounced these words,

words, Fanny opened the door of the dressing room and looked in. The ladies, cried she, are much astonished at your long absence; and Mrs. Hindon is so entertained with your *tete a tete*, that she is absolutely become witty on the occasion. I wish you would therefore appear in your own defence, for I am quite fatigued in finding excuses for you.

This she said with an air of gaiety that was instantly checked on perceiving the embarrassment her sudden appearance at this juncture occasioned. Mr. Howard seemed rather at a loss, and on his account I could not avoid feeling conscious. Fanny finding I answered her with some degree of awkwardness, looked first to the one, then to the other, as if with a design of penetrating into the cause of our being so evidently disconcerted; and observing the raillery in the drawing room accord so well with the confused situation into which her appearance had thrown us, she

she gave way to an expressive smile, and regarding me with an air that sufficiently explained her suspicions, hastily shut the dressing-room door, and departed as if determined not to interrupt us.

At this little manœuvre, which plainly discovered her false conclusions on surprising us, I could not refrain from laughing; and even Mr. Howard was not able to resist half smiling at her mistake. We then separated; but I was forced to support the whole weight of Mrs. Hindon's ridicule on being so long *tete a tete* with her brother. Her wit, however deficient in other respects, claims the merit of being voluble and keen in the extreme; but happily the entrance of more company soon relieved me.

Fanny's countenance during the whole evening exhibited a picture of sly meaning and significance, which it was extremely amusing to behold. Every feature seemed filled with the importance of a newly-

a newly-discovered secret : but in so large a party all explanation was impossible ; and indeed had she ever found an opportunity for importuning me on the subject, I had determined in my own mind to leave her under the influence of an unjust surmise rather than anticipate Mr. Howard's declaration.

One of the company happening to mention with great encomiums an Italian performer who is expected in this country in the course of a month, all the ladies were expressing their eager expectations of then seeing him. I fancy Hermione, whispered Fanny, we shall be mighty snug at Hubert Hill, (Mr. Howard's country seat,) by that time.

Perhaps we may, returned I with a gay air, which confirming her suspicions appeared to give her much delight.

Mr. Howard at that instant joining us, she seemed ready to laugh in his face out of *gayeté du coeur*. Oh ! cried she, still
in

in a soft voice to me, it will be so delightful; tho' to own the truth I was afraid that haughty cousin of ours might have stood in the way.

You are intirely out of the secret, said I. But pray be quiet.

We were then called to a party at Commerce, and an end put to our little tete a tete, which merely served to strengthen Fanny in her error. Oh, thought I to myself, while I observed her eyes sparkle with the prospect of a happy termination thus appearing to the uncertainties and difficulties of our present uncomfortable situation, will the same satisfaction brighten your countenance and lighten your heart, my dearest Fanny, when you find you are yourself the object that is to insure us this advantage.

Captain Wilmot, who has been (perhaps designedly,) out of town ever since our affairs have worn an unfavourable appearance, came in for a few moments.

His

His address to Fanny was constrained; her's to him, haughty, disdainful, and contemptuous. It is not like Fanny to shew so much spirit; but affronted vanity will it seems excite a pride otherwise foreign to the character. It was easy to discern that he had been apprized of the change in our circumstances. Every word, every look and motion, betrayed not the timidity of a lover but the embarrassment and perplexity of a man who felt himself involved in difficulties and knew not how to act. I was charmed with Fanny's behaviour. She not only supported her own dignity, but completely mortified the poor Captain, who tho' happy to be thus dismissed, could not feel much gratified from perceiving the indifference with which the conquest was relinquished.

When the company were gone, and Fanny and I by ourselves, she interrogated me as to the *tete a tete* conversation that
had

had passed ; but I persisted in evading all her enquiries ; for it is but justice to allow Mr. Howard to plead his own cause, while her mind is unbiaſſed by any previous determination. Let him at least reap what benefit may result from an unprejudiced surprize on finding herself warmly solicited by a man whom I know she esteems and respects.

I believe you will not be astonished, when I confess that did I think this a point in which it would be allowable for me to interfere, I should prove a warm advocate in Mr. Howard's favour, and that I anxiously wish this union may take place. Did Fanny's heart feel the slightest repugnance, far should I be from desiring an event, against which in that case principle and delicacy would equally revolt : but if she is capable of entertaining such sentiments as will allow her without reluctance to bestow her hand on that amiable man, I think I could almost

most pronounce her felicity in the marriage state secured ; and what a happy asylum in our present situation must the house of Mr. Howard prove, when authorised to live under his continued protection by the ties of relationship as well as by those of friendship. It is indeed an event which must at once relieve us from the difficulties that seem to await our unconnected state. Yet you may conjecture I would not for worlds insinuate a hint towards urging her to a step with which, in her place, I feel at this moment I myself could not comply.

My sister seemed disappointed on finding her conjectures had been without foundation, and warmly joined in sounding the praises of Mr. Howard ; adding, that in spite of the disproportion of our ages there was no man she would esteem so highly as a brother. Yet Sophia, disinterested as we sometimes flatter ourselves we are, we view with different
eyes

eyes the same object when regarded as our own choice or as that of even our dearest and most intimate friend; and forcible as were Fanny's expressions, I cannot conjecture with any degree of certainty how she will act. My influence over her mind is not trifling; but even were I still more convinced than I am that I should ascertain her happiness by promoting this affair, I should not possess resolution sufficient for interfering on a point of such infinite moment, especially at this time, when a peculiar delicacy detters me. Fanny, on my account as well as her own, may wish to conquer a reluctance so adverse to our mutual comfort and which so many powerful motives of prudence and reason oppose, while at the same time this conflict may prove so severe, that it were cruelty to advise a step which may in this case be denominated a sacrifice.

On

SUNDAY EVENING.

On our return from morning prayers, I retired to read in my own apartment. Fanny remained in the parlour below, but joined me an hour after in the utmost perturbation. On entering, she hastily approached me, and throwing her arms around my neck, burst into a flood of tears, which instantly informed me of what she was unable by words to express.

My dearest girl, said I, whence proceeds this agitation?

She could not immediately reply: but at last—Oh Hermione! exclaimed she, what have I to tell you—Mr. Howard is my lover.

Well my dear, said I smiling, that is no very great calamity.

Good heavens! could you ever have suspected such a thing? Could you ever have imagined that any thing so unlucky would have happened!

I believe I could, answered I. But why

why unlucky? How comes it that the mere mention of a proposal which must be at least acknowledged disinterested, from an amiable and worthy object, should give you this uneasiness. There are no rigid guardians to urge your compliance, nor, alas! parents to command your obedience; and believe me, my love, your sister will not even presume to advise on a subject in which your own feelings and sentiments only are to be consulted.

I soon found, however, that her tears were those of agitation, doubt, and timidity. Disgust and repugnance had no part in her emotions. She confessed she esteemed Mr. Howard; that she believed him one of the best men in the world; but I never once thought of being his wife, said she. I regarded him as a friend sent by heaven to console us for the loss of one parent who is gone for ever, and of another who disowns us. I cannot think

think of marrying him. The idea is almost unnatural; for the possibility of such an event never entered my imagination. Indeed I always concluded his partiality to me was that of a father, and that the disparity of our years would have alone proved sufficient to have prevented the very notion of such an attachment. Had it been you, I should not have experienced the slightest surprize; for I have more than once suspected that he loved you, particularly before we left Languedoc; but for myself, I always imagined he viewed me in the light of a girl who might have amused perhaps, but who had no likelihood of interesting him. Oh! what made him think of me, repeated she several times in the greatest perplexity.

Calm your agitation my dear Fanny, cried I. Consider you are solicited, but not compelled. I have on my part long suspected that you was the object of Mr. Howard's

Howard's affections, and I sincerely own have secretly wished his passion that success which in my opinion it so justly merits. I am convinced the attachment and protection of a character like his must secure happiness to the woman whom he honours with his choice, provided her heart is properly disposed for feeling and answering the tenderness of his. If this is however wanting, believe me Mr. Howard himself has too much delicacy to demand the hand which prudence alone bestows on him; and I am certain possesses too large a share both of good sense and modesty to be disobliged. If then you feel the least actual repugnance to this union, after having maturely weighed and considered all sides of the question, hesitate not to tell him so without coquetry or affectation.

Repugnance is a strong word, said she, after a pause. We are under infinite obligations to him, and he is our only friend.

I should

I should be shocked to disoblige him. But he has so surprized me, that I know not what to think of the matter, nor how to collect my scattered thoughts to ponder on the consequences. Now tell me seriously Hermione, what would you do in my case?

Why I will tell you sincerely, said I. Were I you, with your disposition, your gratitude to Mr. Howard, and your indifference to every other man, I believe I should be his wife.

Yet I am not the least in love with him, cried she.

Involuntarily I was about to reply, that being romantically in love was by all accounts far from an indispensable requisite towards happiness in the married state; but conscious how different my own private sentiments were from according with this opinion, I checked myself from touching on an argument that carried not conviction to my own mind, though from my

my knowledge of Fanny's temper it might have been not improperly offered to her, and only added, that her own feelings must direct her.

We were interrupted by Mrs. Hindon, who came to inform us that the carriage waited to carry us to afternoon prayers. I believe poor Fanny's devotions were not a little disturbed; and on our return I observed she met the eyes of Mr. Howard with a confusion which seemed to forebode no great severity.

I had evidently shewn on which side my suffrage rested; but I cautiously withheld any advice likely to prejudice her mind, which tho' diffident and fearful, appeared neither averse nor determined.

Adieu.

H. SEYMOUR.

LETTER XIV.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

WELL, my dear Sophia, after disappointments so severe, and prospects so cheerless and dreary, the scene begins to brighten. Fanny has at last yielded in Mr. Howard's favour, and finds herself perfectly satisfied and at ease now that her future fate seems determined.

Mr. Howard appears delighted with his good fortune, tho' a propriety of feeling peculiar to himself deters him from testifying it in a manner too pointed. An admirer after forty must not, as he justly observed, adopt the behaviour of one twenty years younger. There is a

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dignity suited to that period, which even love, all-powerful love, must not entirely discard. He possesses all the tenderness, while he has exploded the flights of a lover; and Fanny, who imagined that courtship must be serious, awful and formal, and that she should find an unusual embarrassment attend her new situation, is charmed to perceive that Mr. Howard is exactly what he was before, and that she is if possible still more at ease with him than formerly.

This is rendered more practicable, as they have taken the precaution of keeping the present posture of affairs a profound secret from this family; nor do they intend informing them how matters are likely to be concluded till it is unnecessary any longer to retain them in ignorance. Indeed Mrs. Hindon's entire disregard of delicacy, added to her passion for raillery, makes her the last person

son with whom one would incline to intrust a subject of this nature.

Mr. Howard is extremely urgent with Fanny to have the ceremony which is to unite them as soon as possible performed; and as a thousand reasons conspire to make us with ourselves no longer a burthen on the constrained civilities of Mrs. Hindon, Fanny has promised that after the usual forms of law are concluded, she shall not invent unnecessary delays.

Since my last Mrs. Hindon has more than once renewed her favorite topic. It is not without infinite reluctance that she relinquishes any plan to which in her own mind she has attached an importance. Lady Farnford however seems to have given up all hope; and her son, I understand from Miss Parsons, has been twice refused admittance at Mrs. Hindon's door, in pursuance no doubt of his mother's request to her friend to give no countenance or encouragement to a passion,

sion, now deprived of all the ostentatious advantages that once rendered it so desirable.

Captain Wilmot appears to bear his disappointment with an admirable good grace; though the frigid hauteur with which Fanny behaved to him the evening they met, by discovering the unconcern of her heart, and opening his eyes to the falsity of his self-sufficient security of her affections, must have proved very little gratifying to the all-potent vanity of his character. He has taken care to be constantly engaged ever since, except one morning, when he found courage to step in for ten minutes. Fanny was above stairs when he entered; but followed him a short time after into the parlour. He blushed extremely, and appeared much embarrassed on paying her the usual compliments; nor did his awkwardness seem less conspicuous from an air of forced gayety with which he endeavoured

deavoured to disguise it. Finding his situation, in spite of all his efforts, exceedingly uncomfortable, he made haste to change it, and abruptly took leave.

FEB. 25.

Fanny and Mr. Howard have this day had a long conversation together, in the course of which he laid before her the state of his finances, and suggested the plan of life which he thought would be most conducive to their mutual happiness.

His paternal estate, Hubert Hill, does not exceed three hundred and twenty pounds a year; and this, with a couple of thousands bequeathed him by a friend, constitutes his whole fortune; nor has he any addition to hope for independent of my sister's precarious pittance when Mr. Benfeley's affairs are settled. This no doubt is a very slender income, especially

if a numerous family should bless their union; yet as Mr. Howard is a man of moderate views, and addicted to no expensive pleasures, and Fanny has ever been accustomed to solitude and frugality if not absolutely to a strict œconomy, I think it sufficient, with some attention, for all the necessary indulgencies of life.

His little seat is situated, he says, in a delightful part of the country. The grounds are laid out with taste; and the house, tho' small, is fitted up with infinite neatness in a rustic style. This he proposes making their constant residence; and hopes, by living himself on the spot, to improve it to great advantage, being extremely fond of farming himself.

He did not fail, in the very first moments of Fanny's approbation, to give me the warmest and most pressing invitation to join their family. Indeed without that condition I believe he never
would

would have prevailed with his bride, for she has ever expressed the most painful reluctance at the idea of being separated from me. It was no small satisfaction to me however, to perceive the cordiality and eagerness with which Mr. Howard made this request. Partial as I have always been, said he, to the abode of my youth, with how much delight must I now enjoy it, when blest with companions who possess the power of converting any spot into a paradise.

He sets out for Hubert Hill to-morrow, to give the necessary directions previous to our going down; and in the mean while all other preparations are making, that the ceremony may take place as soon as he returns. Are you not entertained with Fanny's metamorphosis into a sedate, rustic farmer's wife, who when you knew her but three years ago was a little wild giddy girl of thirteen. I am satisfied however she will

conduct herself to admiration in that capacity. She is possessed of a very chearful, contented disposition, the first blessing of Providence; and the reverses of fortune which the last five months have produced, by compleatly convincing her of the fallaciousness of her sanguine expectations of the gay enjoyments of the world, formed in ignorance and solitude, have disposed her mind for relishing and returning to the pure pleasures of retirement and domestic life. In society, she has experienced only mortifications, disappointments, and disgusts, instead of finding it, as she had concluded, a scene of perpetual gaiety, admiration, and delight. In lieu of universal conquest, her admirers have been transient, and her lover insincere. She has made no friends since she left France; and is therefore the more eager to cement to herself him who has proved on trial strongly and truly attached to her:

As

As for myself, this event is every thing I can wish. It secures me an agreeable home with those I love, and conveys me from this hateful city, which I wish from my soul I had never entered.

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MARCH 3.

Mr. Howard is returned from his excursion, much pleased with some little improvements he has begun; and the papers are now ready for signing. Mr. Howard, in the event of no family, leaves his wife sole heiress of all he possesses: but should any children spring from this marriage, her jointure is two hundred per annum. Having no friend to consult on this occasion, all she feared was Mr. Howard's too great generosity; and as she was ashamed even to mention pecuniary matters to him, I was unwillingly obliged on this occasion to be her

C 5 agent,

agent, and absolutely insisted that if her own money, should any be recovered, was settled upon her as he proposed, a deduction of equal value should be made from this stipulation. Every thing therefore relative to settlements is finally adjusted; and but that Fanny's timidity makes her catch at trifles to delay the awful ceremony, things ere now would have been concluded.

Fearing Mrs. Hindon would be extremely disobliged at Fanny's conduct in concealing from her this affair, I persuaded her the other day to confess her present situation; and suggested that as that lady, from whatever motives, had received us into her family, and testified towards us a thousand civilities with great apparent hospitality and kindness, she had reason to be not a little offended at the want of confidence and cordiality this secrecy betrayed; besides common report would soon render all further concealment

cealment useless, and deprive Fanny of an opportunity of paying her the compliment of confidence.

She intreated me to undertake this commission for her. It was not an agreeable one; but as to Fanny it would perhaps have been still more awkward, I consented.

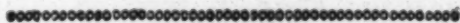
Good heavens! cried Mrs. Hindon, as soon as I had hinted the connection which was likely soon to place my sister among the list of her relations—married to my brother! Miss Fanny to be my brother's wife! Well I declare he is extremely sly, for I could have laid a bet that you were his favorite of the two. He is a bold man however, to think of incumbering himself with a wife and family in his present circumstances. I wish them happy with all my heart; but I plainly perceive he had his own private reasons for regarding my poor nephew's proposals with so much disapprobation.

Well,

Well, every one for themselves in this world; but I always suspect some self-interested motive at bottom when I hear such a piece of work made about *sentiment*, and so many professions of *disinterested friendship*; I think besides, since matters were so far advanced, that Mr. Hindon and myself might have been sooner made acquainted with a love affair that was going on under our own roof.

I pleaded Fanny's diffidence as an apology; but my excuse was in fact extremely lame, and was not easily admitted. Mrs. Hindon could with difficulty prevail on herself to pardon the disrespect. But this story had gone in all points so contrary to her plans and wishes, that I could forgive a little ill humour occasioned by chagrin, and found it not on the whole so hard to reconcile her to it as I had feared. A marriage, tho' even not of her own negotiating, afforded some
speculation

speculation for her active mind to work on; and so fond is she of being officiously busy, that she has set off to-day, accompanied by Fanny, to assist with the utmost cordiality and eagerness in the purchase of some bridal apparatus.



SIX IN THE EVENING.

I had hardly laid down my pen this morning, when Mr. Roatsley was announced. The sight of him, so wholly unprepared as I was for the interview, threw me into the utmost confusion, and I am certain I must have performed the first ceremonials with great awkwardness. The recollection of his late conversation with Mr. Howard, of which I had been solely the subject, and the obligations his generous conduct had laid me under, overpowered me with embarrassment. I knew not how to express my gratitude
for

for a service so essential, which yet from a thousand circumstances I blushed to remember, and possessed scarce courage to touch on: added to this, the discovery I had made since our last meeting, and the mortifications attending our rejected application to his family, struck me so forcibly, that I was in agitation inexpressible when he entered.

He comes, thought I, at once to convince me how injurious were my suspicions of his pride and duplicity, to express his regret for the ill conduct of his relations, and to shew me how dissimilar is his generous mind from that of his unfeeling mother.

So certain was I of the intention of his visit, that I even wished the explanation over, which must to him prove so embarrassing, as it was likely so little to redound to the honor of his family, and expected every moment when the subject [should be introduced. But most carefully

fully did he guard against every topic that could lead to this point; which he evidently avoided with the most sedulous precaution. Yet his manner possessed that insinuating attention, and his voice that winning softness, which seemed to imply the utmost satisfaction in my company, and which bestows on *his* a charm, that may be felt, Sophia, alas, too acutely! but which cannot be delineated.

The interesting elegance of his address is indeed so uncommonly engaging, that I think it must be wholly impossible even for a stranger to behold him enter without pleasure, or see him depart without experiencing regret. It is not alone that he is perfectly well bred and intelligent, for from moderate parts, polished by education and knowledge of the world, this may be expected, and uncharacteristic of the English nation as the refinement of good breeding is supposed to be, I have seen, since my residence here,
more

more than one person to whom I think that panegyric is justly due ; but Mr. Roatsley's mind speaks in his countenance and in his manner, and confers on every look and on every motion that grace which a disposition compleatly amiable, and talents thoroughly well cultivated, cannot fail to diffuse over the appearance and behaviour.

My first flutters giving way to the respectful ease of his conversation, I took courage at length to mention the obligation I owed him. I have been inexpressibly desirous, said I, of an opportunity to return you my most grateful acknowledgments for the attention and trouble you have been so humane as to bestow upon an affair which has occasioned me more uneasiness and perplexity than it is possible to conceive.

I am then extremely sorry, cried he with warmth, that my presence should have induced you for an instant to recall
a subject

a subject so painful. Let it be banished, I beseech you, for ever from your remembrance, and along with it all expressions of gratitude to which I cannot flatter myself I merit the slightest claim. Heaven knows what exertions I would make, what anxiety I would undergo, to merit the approbation of Miss Seymour; but as yet I am not so happy as to congratulate myself with having had it in my power to perform any service that could deserve her thanks. Let me know my dear Madam, added he, by what means I can procure a title to that happiness, and you shall perceive, by the avidity with which I shall obey your commands, how infinitely I should prize my good fortune in obliging you.

Does he wish me, thought I, to apply to him to interceed with Lord Belmont; or are these professions mere words of course, to which are annexed neither meaning nor intention. I was piqued
that

that he adhered so determinedly to the resolutions of his relations, and only made a slight inclination of my head very gravely in return to this speech.

A degree of surprize was evident in his countenance at the stateliness of my manner; the cause I think he must have been with ease able to comprehend. However he chose to place it to another account; and finding that an air of chagrin involuntarily hung on my features——Miss Seymour, said he, after several ineffectual attempts to amuse me on different subjects which a slight degree of penetration sufficed to shew did not interest me——I cannot but perceive that I have been so unfortunate as to offend you; and so severe, so painful is this idea, that tho' my confession may at first rather encrease than diminish your displeasure, I cannot resist trusting to your candour and indulgence by a sincere avowal of the only circumstance wherein I think it is possible
for

for me to have given cause for your displeasure.

Finding I made no reply, for in truth I knew not what to answer——I sincerely confess, continued he, and let, I beseech you, the severity of this confession plead in my behalf, that after having been blest with your company that happy evening at Dover, my ideas and expectations of the dignity of your behaviour were raised to so just an height, that they could not but suffer some abatement on witnessing what I could not but consider as an impropriety, and which I am certain Miss Seymour herself would have regarded as an indelicacy. I am conscious I ought to have judged less rashly. I know that I ought to have suspected my own eyes, rather than any indecorum in you; but I was led to do you injustice by a multiplicity of circumstances, which can hardly have given more pain to your feelings than they have conveyed to mine;
and

and you may recollect, Madam, that the instant you appeared still more unaccountable, instead of plunging deeper into doubt, I penetrated into the whole mystery, and not only in my own mind fully acquitted you of the imprudence of a clandestine interview with a young man who merited only your scorn and detestation, but also immediately perceived that though the whole was wrapt in obscurity, the veil was not placed over your conduct by your own hands; and I no longer hesitated to ask an explanation from Mr. Howard, since I was completely convinced all must redound to your honour.

Oh! Sir, cried I, penetrated by this speech and the eagerness with which he entered on his justification, be assured when I reflect on this painful affair, it is not only without the slightest displeasure at any part of your conduct, but with
the

the utmost gratitude for the humane interest you testified in it.

May I then flatter myself I am forgiven, cried he warmly, and kissed my hand with a fervor that dyed me with Crimson.

I had just withdrawn it, when Mrs. Hindon and Fanny returned from their excursion, followed by a servant loaded with various purchases.

I introduced Mr. Roatsley to Mrs. Hindon, who appeared much delighted with the acquisition of an acquaintance of his rank and figure, and began conversing with her accustomed volubility and avidity even before she had seated herself.

As she held a pretty large parcel in her hands, part of Fanny's paraphernalia, he politely offered to relieve her by placing it on the table.

Perhaps Sir, cried she facetiously, these ladies may generously reward your trouble

trouble by presenting you with part of the contents.

I shall be much delighted with the honor of any gift from these ladies, returned he. But pray may I be allowed to ask of what nature is the donation?

Poor Fanny blushed up to the ears. Good God, Madam! cried she, with a reproachful look.

Nay, answered she, laughing immoderately, I'm sure I shan't tell; but if Mr. Roatsley should be clever enough to guess it, you know neither of us can help that. Lord, look, look, cried she with entire disregard to Fanny's confusion, how conscious Miss Fanny appears of the secret: and Miss Seymour, I declare she blushes too, as much as to say—but I must take care not to blab.

Roatsley smiled at our mutual confusion; for indeed I felt extremely for poor Fanny, and was not a little ashamed also for Mrs. Hindon's indelicate raillery.

If

If my enquiries give the ladies so much pain, said he, I am afraid I must be contented to remain in ignorance; tho' I confess my curiosity is raised to the highest pitch to discover this important secret.

Mr. Hindon just then entered; and an introduction taking place between him and Mr. Roatsley, I was in hopes Fanny would have been relieved from her persecution. His lady, however, seemed determined such an excellent joke should not have so speedy a termination.

My dear, cried she, let us see if *you* can solve this riddle, which has puzzled Mr. Roatsley's brain in vain to unravel, and the bare mention of which has plunged these ladies into the most painful confusion. The secret, or rather the solution, is contained in that package of brown paper that lies on the table.

I shall take a very simple method of discovery, returned he, and seizing the
parcel

parcel as Fanny was flying to secure it, he instantly cut the packthread with which it was tied, and holding it above her reach, a number of favors composed of white and silver dropt on the ground.

The secret is discovered at length, exclaimed Mrs. Hindon, laughing with great vociferation. Well I'm sure ladies you need not care much, for it is of a nature that will soon speak for itself, and I'm sure you must acknowledge I said never a word of the matter.

It is then a matrimonial one I presume, said Mr. Roatsley, with a constrained air and in a very low voice to Mrs. Hindon.

Yes, returned she, smiling expressively as if she was not at liberty to satisfy him further, though she evidently seemed impelled by a strong inclination to enter upon family transactions, equally unsolicited and impertinent.

Poor Fanny returned to her seat much ashamed and confused; while Mr. Hindon

don following, laughed most indelicately in her face; and as I appeared little less embarrassed—Poor Miss Seymour! cried he half ironically, tapping me familiarly on the back, Mr. Roatsley I am certain will agree with me that *your* complexion requires no foreign aid, so pray don't blush so very deep:—which piece of advice you may suppose was not much calculated to enable me to profit from it.

Mr. Roatsley finding his presence rather augmented the awkwardness of Fanny's situation, suddenly wished us good morning and departed abruptly.

This transaction was in itself trifling, had it not shewn the family with whom we reside in a vulgar and absurd point of view; and the affair of the parcel could have excited neither curiosity nor suspicion, had not Mrs. Hindon bestowed an importance on it by her ill-judged railery, sufficient to convince Mr. Roatsley that something “more was meant than

met the ear." However, except in having given poor Fanny some uneasy moments, it was of little consequence, as she has at length consented that Friday shall unite her with Mr. Howard; and immediately after the ceremony, at which only Miss Parsons and this family are to be present, we set off for Hubert Hill; which being seventy five miles from town, we shall not reach till the second evening.

But tell me, my Sophia, how shall I account for Roatsley's behaviour during our *tete a tete* this morning? To suppose him entirely ignorant of an affair which must have naturally and unavoidably occasioned some disturbance, and no small degree of discussion in his family, is to imagine what is not only improbable, but I own almost impossible. Have I not reason then to be displeased with the inflexible pride, (alas, it is a family failing!) which his conduct too plainly indicates: still perhaps retaining
the

the embers of that trifling partiality he seemed once disposed to feel for me, yet proudly ashamed, or weakly afraid to venture on a step his family unjustly prohibits, he seeks my company and conversation under the pretended veil of ignorance. But under a pretence so shallow, never shall he receive the shadow of my notice, never shall I countenance that person as my friend, who disdains to acknowledge he is allied to me.

Yet, my dear, how impossible is it to see Mr. Roatsley and to retain displeasure. In vain I call offended dignity and wounded pride to the aid of my indignation. He is absent, and I blame him; but when present, to preserve even a cold reserve, proves the utmost exertion of my resolution.



LETTER XV.]

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

MARCH 6.

HOW infinitely insinuating is this proud cousin of our's. I become every hour more afraid of myself, yet every moment exhausts my imagination with efforts to discover indulgent motives for a conduct which reason and feeling equally condemn.

Mrs. Hindon having asked the favor of his company to her assembly last night, I was not surprised to see him enter: for I confess I expected he would profit from her invitation, tho' at the time he had hinted something of a prior engagement, which he said in all probability

bility would prevent him. But never was I so much struck, so much confounded by his appearance. How inconceivably superior did he look to every one of his own sex who was present.

There is an air of dignity, I had almost said of grandeur, in his figure, equally the result of the most elegant symmetry of form and the most lively penetration and intelligence of countenance, which to a superficial observer might, I should imagine, at first sight wear the aspect of *hauteur*, did not the amiable softness of his address entirely contradict that idea; and I make no doubt but this contrast may augment the prepossession which every one on the slightest acquaintance seems inclined to feel for him; for all must be delighted to perceive that person who appears, tho' merely from the graceful superiority of his height, to look down on others, descend on conversing with them into the gentlest and least assuming equality.

The apartments were filled with company before he arrived ; and being surrounded by a group of young people at one end of the room, he did not immediately distinguish me.

Shall I confess that I felt impatient on finding myself unnoticed, and hurt at perceiving that Mrs. Hindon, on his entrance, detained him in conversation a considerable time. I found some consolation, however, in observing that he seemed to give her his attention with constraint, and that he often cast his eyes with anxiety around, as if but little interested in what he heard.

During this interval Miss Farnford and another young lady detained me in an insipid chit chat, while both my eyes and mind wandered to another subject. Having soon discovered him however, he instantly engaged their admiration, and attracted their whole attention.

Who's

Who's that, pray, Miss Pierfon? exclaimed Miss Farnford.

It is the handsome Mr. Roatsley. I'm sure you must have heard of him, returned the other.

He is absolutely the handsomest creature I ever beheld. Pray is he a man of fortune?

Lord, cried the friend, don't you know that he is brother to Lord Linrose, and possessed of heaven knows how many thousands a year. He is just returned from abroad, in consequence of a splendid inheritance left him by an uncle in Ireland; and all the world says that he is amazingly clever, accomplished and agreeable; indeed he has all the appearance of it, for he is astonishingly handsome.

I should suppose then he a'nt married, since he is so lately come home?

No, but just on the verge of being so. The wedding cloaths and equipages are

all bespoke, and I'm told his marriage is to take place immediately.

Oh! Sophia! don't you feel for me at this moment. My sensations were unutterable. I felt as if my blood was congealed within my veins, and every pulse had refused any longer to perform it's function. I had not courage sufficient to ask Miss Pierson what authority she had for this unlook'd-for information; but my companions, unsuspecting of my agitations, went on with their conversation in a half whisper, and Miss Farnford's curiosity soon satisfied mine.

But who pray is the happy woman? cried she gayly.

Lord Mortonbury's daughter, Lady Elizabeth Sedley. She is a piece of perfection by all accounts. Nobody before was ever so accomplished. She has all sorts of languages—music, painting, nay poetry too, at her finger's ends; then she is reckoned a prodigious fine woman,
and

and dances divinely. Besides all this, she has a vast fortune, being an only child; so that she is esteemed the first match almost in England; and they say that her father and Lord Belmont, Mr. Roatsley's grandfather, have all along designed them for each other, even from their infancy.

Well, that's so odd in old people, returned Miss Farnford. I'm sure if papa was to do so by me, I should hate my husband horridly, were he ever so handsome.

That is far from being the case with Lady Elizabeth; for it seems she is vastly in love with him, and indeed no wonder, for I suspect in her situation you would not carry your love of contradiction quite so far.

Miss Pierfon's conversation was suddenly interrupted by Mr. Roatsley's approach; who having just at this moment discovered me, came forward in the

height of my perturbation, with a smile which was suddenly on regarding me converted into a look of apprehension and anxiety. The intelligence to which I had just been listening, could not fail to give me the most uneasy emotions, and the mortification attending this secret confession, wounded me no less. What? cried I to myself, have I been all this while weakly allowing an attachment to steal on my heart, which can neither be excused by reason nor principle? Why do I envy another that happiness which I never had the slightest grounds for believing would ever prove mine? and why should I feel myself so unaccountably interested in the fate of a man, of whose pride and inflexibility, spite of his insinuating exterior, I have such glaring proofs?

These interrogations, tho' meant to rouse me from my too susceptible weakness, had by no means the desired effect;
and

and scarcely had Mr. Roatsley begun the usual enquiries after my health, when he added——I am afraid, Miss Seymour, your countenance replies too plainly to my question. I am afraid you find yourself indisposed. Perhaps the heat of the room affects you? Will you allow me the honour of conducting you to the other, where you will have more air, I imagine. Hardly able to reply, I allowed him to lead me away tacitly confirming his conjecture, partly from the effects of an unconquerable embarrassment which seized me at that instant, and partly with the view of concealing my agitation from my two companions, of whose suspicions I was apprehensive.

Miss Farnford however, the instant she saw me addressed by a young man of so elegant an appearance, contrived to pin herself to me for the rest of the evening, in hopes of improving this accidental meeting into an acquaintance; and
made

made so many attempts to attract his notice and engage him in conversation, that I really blushed for the forward and childish coquetry of her behaviour; particularly as from seeing her constantly by my side, or hanging on my arm, he must have concluded her one of my most intimate friends; and tho' he answered her with civility, and the most scrupulous good breeding, he seemed by no means charmed with her stile of manners.

She was so much delighted with him however, that I was in continual pain lest he should overhear her expressions of admiration——a matter which gave her very little concern. Pray don't you think this Mr. Roatsley the finest young man you ever beheld in your life? said she at length, when he had turned for a moment to speak with Mrs. Hindon.

Yes, he is handsome, said I, with an affected air of indifference. At least I believe he is thought so.

Thought

Thought so ! repeated she ; Lord but don't you think so. I never saw any person have so much the look of a man of fashion. But he is just going to be married.

Is he, said I, faintly.

Yes indeed, and the lady is so in love with him as never any body was before. Indeed I don't wonder at that circumstance in the least. But pray don't you think it is too much to be Mr. Roatsley and the possessor of such prodigious wealth at once ? Don't you think so ?

Yes, perhaps ;—oh no, not at all, returned I with an emotion to which only Miss Farnford could have been blind ; but eager to talk, she perceived not my perplexity, or attributed it to my late indisposition.

But pray tell me, how did you become so well acquainted with him ?

We crossed over in the same packet boat from Calais.

Did

Did you indeed. I wish I had made one of the party. I dare say it must have been a very agreeable one.

Yes, pleasant enough, said I, quite fatigued with giving attention to a train of questions so little interesting, while my thoughts were entirely occupied with a subject that proved, alas! too much so.

Mr. Roatsley again joining us, prevented her proceeding; and Lady Farnford's carriage being announced, Miss was summoned soon after to attend her mother. Being then relieved from the frivolous interruption of our companion, we entered into a conversation, the life and spirit of which were maintained solely by his own efforts; for though I exerted myself to the utmost, a weight unspeakable oppressed my spirits, and wholly damped the satisfaction this evening would have otherwise afforded.

Yet I own his behaviour puzzled and
astonished

astonished me. Had you witnessed what passed during this evening, Sophia; had you beheld the unconscious ease with which he conversed, you never could have suspected that any desire of concealment lay upon his mind. All seemed open, sincere, and unreserved. He apparently wished me to confess many little circumstances relating to our life abroad, and even presumed to hint at enquiries respecting my father and our abode in Languedoc, tho' with a politeness quite distinct from impertinent inquisitiveness, and with which, in a stranger, I might have been gratified, supposing them the result of interest in my concerns; but which in my cousin I could only suspect to be the consequence of an imperfect information that had excited his curiosity. These are conclusions, however, which did not till afterwards occur. At the time, I could think of nothing but the intelligence that had just been communicated

municated to me, and the destruction of a thousand airy dreams which had made the strongest impression in my bosom.

Oh! my Sophia! however you may and must condemn, do not despise me for the weakness which every line of my journal displays. Good heavens! were any eyes but yours to see my writing! The very idea makes me tremble. But to unburthen my mind to you, by disclosing my inquietudes, is the only solace of my existence. When I reflect how unreserved, how perfectly free from concealment or restraint, are my communications, I can scarce conceive how I possess resolution to transmit them to writing. Indeed had not an early habit of confidence familiarised me to the idea of laying open my heart upon paper, I should never have found courage to risk the hazards of so long a journey as they must take before they reach your hands.

Mr. Roatsley declined joining any of
the

the card parties, tho' strongly solicited by Mrs. Hindon; and Fanny being engaged at the commerce table, he gave to me his whole attention. He enquired what were my engagements in public, and hoped to have the pleasure of meeting me either at Ranelagh next evening, or at the Opera on Saturday: but I said, that on my sister's account I should not have it in my power to visit any public place till her affairs were finally settled; and that immediately after it, I should accompany her to the country.

What? said he with some surprise, at this unpropitious season do you think of leaving town? I hope, however, your stay will be short? The country can have no attractions at present.

I have no thoughts of returning again to town, answered I with a melancholy I could not wholly repress. A thousand reasons conspire to make me wish myself settled in the country, tho' we were
blocked

blocked up with snow and enjoyed not the society of a single individual out of our own little family circle for months to come.

That is a very singular taste at your time of life, said he. That Miss Seymour should incline to seclude herself in retirement is not merely cruel, but I had almost said, unnatural. Shall I not even have the pleasure of seeing you at the Opera before you go?

I answered I was afraid not, as we were to set off on Friday. At this moment Mrs. Hindon approaching, requested that he would favour her with his company to supper together with a small party who had been selected.

To this he instantly consented. On seating ourselves at table, tho' he made an attempt to get by me, I was placed at a considerable distance, as Mrs. Hindon, out of respect, asked him to seat himself at the upper end, at her right hand, and entertained

entertained him in a very earnest half-whisper during the repast.

Sensible of her imprudence, I was seized with apprehension lest we and our situation were the topics on which she had chosen to expatiate; which, from her extreme neglect of delicacy and entire disregard to propriety, was not improbable, and must have involved us in the severest mortification. I was seriously miserable from the instant this suspicion occurred; and began even to dread that she had been soliciting his aid or pleading our cause;—an idea that tormented me in the cruellest manner; for she often glanced her eye on Fanny and on me, and led Mr. Roatsley to regard us in a similar manner. I am now happily relieved however from these fears; for when I afterwards founded her on the subject, she did not betray by the slightest hint having acted so imprudently, nor
could

could I gather from her discourse any circumstances to alarm me.

After supper I was asked to sing. Mr. Roatsley is passionately fond of music, and confessed himself a performer on several instruments. This you may believe did not diminish my natural timidity; but the intreaties of the company were so pressing, and those of Mr. and Mrs. Hindon so importunate, that I was constrained to comply, and acquitted myself indeed very ill.

My spirits, low and oppressed, made the little song of "Ah! my charmante Louise" affect me almost to tears while I sung. How many painful recollections did it bring to my mind, when my Sophia and myself received our instructions together in that delightful accomplishment.

I slept very ill last night. Confounded by a variety of conjectures, I knew not which implicitly to credit. From one
source

source of anxiety however I considered it was in my power to be relieved, and any certainty was preferable to my present suspense: besides, to matrimonial intelligence entire belief is not always to be given; and as Roatsley observes, to what we dread we are most liable to give our confidence; I therefore resolved to pay a morning visit to Miss Pierson, to whom I have owed one a considerable time, but whose acquaintance indeed, till this accident, I had not much inclination to cultivate. At present however she is the only channel from whence I can draw information, and her society is become interesting. I intended, with all the apparent indifference I could assume, to renew the subject of her recent intelligence, and endeavour to discover on what grounds she had advanced the fact with such apparent certainty. She was from home however when I called, and I am just returned not a little disappointed.

How

How unlucky it is that I must leave town while I remain in this painful uncertainty. Yet why do I call it so, when but for the delusions of a too sanguine mind I should not harbour a doubt concerning the authenticity of Miss Pierſon's intelligence. I have formed fifty little ſchemes to meet with her; but not being able to form a pretext for calling again myſelf, I intend to make Fanny go in my place to pick up what accounts ſhe can learn reſpecting this affair.

ELEVEN AT NIGHT.

Miss Pierſon has ſaved me the trouble of planning ſome little artifice to meet with her, by returning my viſit this very evening in an eaſy way, accompanied by Miſs Farnford.

My heart beat ſeverely at their entrance. How do circumſtances, apparently

rently the most trivial, change the face of things. Two girls, whose acquaintance but a few days ago, from the frivolous though harmless insipidity of their conversation I should rather have avoided than courted, were now become the objects of my most anxious solicitude.

I was in hopes, from the eagerness with which they had before entered on the subject I now wished so much to introduce, that they might of themselves lead to it; and one is but too apt to conclude others in some measure influenced by circumstances that convey interest and agitation to our own bosoms. Miss Farnford and her friend were struck with Roatsley's elegance, and the intelligence of a wedding, interesting to all girls, had attracted their curiosity and attention; but after the conjecture relating to jewels, settlements, finery, &c. were adjusted, to which such a topic generally gives birth, the idea in all probability occurred

occurred to them no more. I was therefore obliged to touch on it myself in the manner I imagined least liable to suspicion. Fortunately the penetration of my companions was not to be dreaded, and still more fortunately Mr. and Mrs. Hindon were engaged abroad.

In the course of conversation I mentioned a catalogue of marriages as the news of the day; and tacked Mr. Roatsley's to the end of my list, tho' not without a glow on my cheek.

O don't you remember it was I who told you of that match, said Miss Pier-son, the other night when we were here.

I will not vouch for the authenticity of half my intelligence, said I; and perhaps little more credit ought to be given to this last union than to many of the others.

Oh I ask your pardon. I assure you Mr. Roatsley's marriage is an undoubted fact. But certainly you ought to know
all

all about it better than any body, for I am told that he is your cousin ; tho' I believe I ought to request your excuse for mentioning it, as I believe you don't wish it to be made public.

I never heard of it till the other evening, said I ; and now that I recollect, you I believe was my authority.

And that I promise you is as good as possible : for Lady Mary Lawrence, who is aunt to Lady Elizabeth Sedley, and who has had the charge of her from her infancy, (Lady Mortonbury having died when her daughter was quite a child,) is extremely intimate with my mother, and has frequently mentioned to her this projected alliance, which she is exceedingly eager should take place, as the young man is a very particular favorite with her, and she designs I know to present her niece with a very valuable set of jewels on the occasion, and they are actually bespoke : tho' Lady Mary told my

mother the affair was not to be concluded till Lord Belmont's return from abroad, (who has been the chief promoter of the match,) and his Lordship is not expected till autumn; therefore the marriage is not publicly talked of by the relations on either side, but all the world knows of it for all that.

My doom is then fixed, said I to myself. My authority is undoubted, and all delusion at an end. Let me not sink however with unpardonable weakness under the blow. Let me resist this overwhelming regret with all my fortitude. Had it not been from the foible of a too susceptible heart, all efforts had been on this account unnecessary. Let me therefore atone to my own mind by the most rigorous exertions for the error I have committed, and let a name so fatal, so interesting, be mentioned in my journal no more.

These reflections, which in an instant
passed

passed through my mind, bestowed a momentary enthusiasm that enabled me to talk with a composure on the subject for which I applauded myself not a little.

I make no doubt but Lady Elizabeth will be extremely happy, said I, for Mr. Roatsley really seems to be an agreeable man.

Oh! extremely clever and agreeable certainly, cried Miss Farnford, (who had been examining some work with Fanny above stairs, but who just then returned,) and the handsomest creature I ever beheld. But I think if he is actually going to be married the lady has reason to be not a little jealous, for if ever I discovered a man to be in love in my life, Mr. Roatsley is deeply so with Miss Seymour.

I blushed excessively, but attempted to laugh it off.

Nay you need not blush so violently, cried Miss Pierfon, for Miss Farnford

did not accuse *you* of being in love with *him*. I give you my word however I made the same observation. During supper his eyes were never from you ; and when you sung, (and really you sung divinely,) I never beheld a countenance express admiration and delight as his did. He seemed to feel every note.

My confusion was inexpressible. Conscious guilt made me extremely apprehensive lest it should excite the notice and raillery of my two gay companions ; and Fanny, instead of endeavouring to relieve me from my embarrassment, had the roguery to plunge me still deeper into difficulties. If music be the food of love, cried she, Mr. Roatsley was probably dreaming of his intended during the song, and of course might be more feelingly disposed to relish its pathetic charms than if he had been in the same comfortable state of indifference with the performer. This she uttered with a most
malicious

malicious smile; but fortunately the ladies were in haste to pay other visits, and left us soon after.

Adieu, my dear Sophia. I shall not write again till the marriage is concluded.

H. SEYMOUR.

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LETTER XVI.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

HUBERT HILL, MARCH 10.

HERE we are, all safe and well; tho' we have had two dismal days for travelling, and did not arrive at the end of our journey till late yesterday evening, the roads being rendered almost impassable by a late very heavy fall of snow. We

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found

found a comfortable, snug mansion, a delightful fire, and an elegant little repast ready to be placed on the table, all of which we enjoyed extremely, after having been frozen so many hours on the road.

Dinner being over, Mr. Howard carried us through the different apartments of this rustic dwelling, which are fitted up with infinite taste though with a frugality adapted to its size and simplicity. None of the rooms are large, but cheerful in the highest degree, and having been all newly painted, papered, &c. possess an air not only of uncommon neatness, but even of elegance, a property which in my opinion consists in symmetry rather than in splendor.

I know you will expect the particulars of the wedding: but neither romance nor incident is to be expected where sixteen is united to forty. Fanny would allow of no forms, though Mrs. Hindon wished

[wished extremely to detain us a few days, to introduce a little merriment to season, as she said, the solemnity of the affair. But Fanny was inexorable. She would not even consent to make a bridal appearance; but was dressed simply in a travelling dress, being on the wing for Hubert Hill.

MARCH II.

This morning being a clear frost, we walked out for an hour and an half. The country around could not be seen to advantage, where every object was covered with snow; yet it appeared beautiful. The house is situated in the most romantic spot I ever beheld; fronting the south west, on the gentle slope of a hill which rises by a very gradual ascent. A noble river, the banks of which are shaded with very fine old trees, runs be-

low, within sight of the windows; and the eminence behind, on which there is a thriving plantation, gives the little mansion a very snug appearance. The garden is an excellent one, and well stored with common fruit trees of the best kinds, that amply compensate for the want of those luxurious ones to be obtained only through the expensive aid of a hot house. The pleasure ground, tho' of small extent, is laid out with admirable taste, and the little inclosures kept in such good order, that I think in summer Hubert Hill must be the most delightful spot in the world.

I am surprized Mr. Howard spoke so faintly in its praise. But no doubt he wished to surprize us in favor of our future residence. It is on a very small scale indeed, and partakes more of an ornamented farm than a country seat; but I think the worthy owner has reason to be not a little vain of the improvements
he

he has himself effected since it came into his possession by the death of his father ; an event that took place only a few years previous to his acquaintance with our family.

From the period of his succession to Hubert Hill till that of his leaving England, an amiable sister, who died of a consumption at the age of twenty-nine, presided at the head of his table ; and it is to her taste and regularity that Fanny owes the comfortable and neat elegance of various conveniences not to be expected in the house of a bachelor.

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MARCH 19.

Nothing but continual rain or snow, and no possibility of stirring out of doors. We endeavour, however, to make ourselves the more comfortable within ; Fanny, who makes all the bustle of a

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young

young mistress of a family vain of the importance of her new charge, finds continual amusement and employment in directing all her little household matters, for which she really seems to possess a talent, tho' I sometimes alledge that her orders are calculated rather to confuse than adjust. Being displeased with the furniture of her drawing room, which is a little antique, we have set about a serious piece of work in order to fit it up with elegance. We have begun to work chairs and hangings in imitation of natural flowers; which, as there is scope given both for taste and ingenuity, is an agreeable occupation. You know this sort of work is a convent accomplishment; by which means Fanny and I are adepts in it. I have likewise undertaken to cover the walls of the little chearful parlour with landscapes, for which many delightful scenes even from its windows furnish ample subject; so that we are
provided

provided with abundant employment for at least a twelvemonth to come. Mr. Howard, who has a well chosen collection of the works of the best authors, both French and English, generally reads to us while we sit at work. The evenings we divide with a little music, and our favourite chess, so that they never appear too long, and our life on the whole glides along in a tenor so smooth, rational and placid, that I hope in a short time to enjoy it with perfect relish. Even at present I am conscious I could no where be more happy.

MARCH. 21^d

This evening I received a letter from Mrs. Hindon. Oh Sophia into what agitation has it not thrown me. Read, my dear, what that officious woman writes.

TO

TO MISS SEYMOUR.

I have been prevented from writing you sooner, my dear Miss Seymour, by a slight fever, which though by no means alarming, proved troublesome for a few days, and was attended by a headach so severe that an application to my pen has been till this day wholly impracticable; although I have been for this week past extremely desirous to inform you of a piece of good fortune, the merit of which I must take entirely to my self. To give you a clear and distinct idea of the whole affair, I must begin by previously acquainting you, that perceiving you adhered obstinately to your resolution of attempting no further application to your family, a measure which I always freely confessed to you I could not but highly disapprove of, I myself, out of mere friendship, determined upon a step, the happy success of which I am convinced
must

must for once induce you to applaud my management.

As Mr. Roatsley, from his visits and polite civility, appeared to have taken no part in the family transactions, I seized an opportunity, the evening he did us the honour of supping with us, to hint at the difficulties and distressing embarrassments in which doubtless you must have found yourselves involved, had not the marriage of the one sister offered an agreeable home for both: but what was my surprize on finding that he listened to me with all the pity and astonishment of a man who was wholly unconcerned in the affair; and when, emboldened by the compassion he testified, I ventured to tell him what a severe disappointment Lord Belmont's cruel behaviour had proved, he declared he had never been informed of the application, nor could he believe it possible he said that an affair so melancholy and interesting should have failed
of

of success with his Lordship, whose heart was open to every call of distress and to every sentiment of humanity. These were Mr. Roatsley's very words. Delighted to find my auditor so much more agreeably disposed than I could have hoped for, you may believe I delayed not laying hold of this favourable moment to expatiate on the mortifying and severe reverse of situation which but a very short time ago had been all at once presented before your eyes, by the cruel rejection of his Lordship, whose favour was now become, through the imprudence of your late guardian, still more essential. I represented, in terms the most pathetic and moving, the state of distressful poverty and dependence, to which but so lately it seemed likely you must both have been reduced, had not the happy and fortunate event before mentioned in part offered a relief, and I failed not to hint, in a pretty explicit manner,

manner, how useful and acceptable, nay how necessary some addition to your present finances must undoubtedly prove; more especially as your future expectations, were they even realized to the utmost of your hopes, would afford but a very scanty support and be scarcely capable of bestowing the mere necessities of dress; while for those of subsistence you was constrained to depend upon the limited income of your brother in law.

Never was man more affected than Mr. Roatsley at this recital, and he expressed his sympathy in the strongest terms. We had not however either leisure or opportunity for discussing matters fully. But he faithfully promised to exert his utmost activity and avail himself of Lord Belmont's interest towards contributing to place you in a situation suitable to your birth and education. So eager was he in the cause, that he called two different times on the two succeeding days,

days, with the intention no doubt of making further enquiries and to consult what could be done most speedily and effectually for your service. I was unluckily from home both times, but I think you told me you had seen him the day before you left town, tho' I perceived he had not chosen as yet to make his good intentions known to you; and on my part, as I doubted not but my application would turn to good account, I had determined to be silent on the subject till I could surprize you agreeably with the certainty of your good fortune. The morning after Mr. Roatsley again did me the honour of calling; but we were then all engaged at church on the grand affair. Having been so unsuccessful, he addressed himself to me by letter the very evening after, and a very pretty letter it is, I give you my word, informing me in the genteelest terms that his endeavours in behalf of my friend had
been

been so happily crowned with success, that thro' the interest of a certain nobleman in power, who was the intimate friend of Lord Belmont, a pension of two hundred per annum had been procured for Miss Seymour, while she remained unmarried.

But as I have reason to imagine, (says he, for I give you the very words of his letter,) that your amiable young friend labours under present difficulties, will you Madam venture to assist me in a pious fraud which will engage my warmest gratitude and respect: your friendship and intimacy in all probability must afford you a pretext for offering Miss Seymour that assistance which it may be improper to appear as coming from me. In answer to this, I immediately wrote Mr. Roatsley that I agreed most willingly to his generous scheme, and the day following received a bill for two hundred pounds, enclosed in a letter as expressive of

of gratitude and acknowledgments as if I had conferred on him the greatest of all favors.

As a boon from so near a relation, probably intended as a discharge in full of all demands upon himself and his relations, I cannot suppose that even your delicacy, (over refined as I have sometimes thought it,) will object to the present; neither can I prevail with myself to take the merit of a gift, the magnificence of which, when considered as mine, must undoubtedly have awakened your suspicion. Mr. Roatsley made yet another attempt to visit me soon after this transaction, but I was confined to my bed, and had it not in my power to see him.

Adieu, dear Miss Seymour! Pray accept Mr. Hindon's best wishes and mine, and present the same to my brother and his fair bride; and believe me
your sincere friend and servant,

MARTHA HINDON.

Oh! Sophia! what were my emotions on reading this letter! No words can speak my feelings. Though penetrated with the exertions of my amiable cousin in my favour, how severely was I mortified, how deeply wounded, to find myself the object of his compassion—of his generosity—of his pecuniary assistance. Oh! how did all the pride of my heart rise at the humiliating idea.

Why did Mrs. Hindon presume to interfere, without my knowledge or consent, in an affair for which she possesses the requisites neither of judgment nor delicacy. Proud as she appears of her success, I shall for ever regret the busy officiousness which dictated a step so dreadful to me to think of. Yet I fear I am unjust. The poor woman had certainly no apparent aim but my advantage in this unlucky transaction, and perhaps prejudice alone induces me to suspect it the mere effects of her intermeddling disposition,

position, which derives its highest gratification from prying into the concerns of others, and is delighted to find occupation for its restless and frivolous activity.

The letter, at the first reading, threw me into agonies. I perceived only the mortifying point of view in which Mrs. Hindon had represented me to Roatsley, and that reflection poisoned and wholly embittered the satisfaction which the notion of his anxiety and interest might otherwise have excited. To paint in colours the most pitiable and moving, so as to raise his pity and sympathy, the situation to which we might have been reduced?—good heavens! can she imagine this a circumstance from which I could derive satisfaction? Her representation too was by no means just, and had not even the merit of truth to recommend it: for tho' at present I am constrained to depend upon the limited income of my brother in law, Mr. Howard

ard expects that a very few weeks will in all human probability see Mr. Bensfeley's affairs adjusted, and two thousand pounds at least retrieved, for his wife's share and mine, out of the wreck of our fortune. From the interest of my patrimony, slender as it is, in this retired abode I am certain I shall have not only all my necessary wants supplied, but possess the ability of making such little useful presents to my sister, as shall secure to me my independency in my own eyes. But this is a notion which to Mrs. Hindon must appear the mere fiction of a romantic brain. Born an heiress, and accustomed to derive that vain importance on which her heart is fixed from the possession of wealth and an ostentatious display of grandeur, she regards opulence as the first of human blessings and its deprivation as the harbinger of the most acute misery.

Of the pension I heard with unfeigned regret.

regret. Shocked at the circumstances which had given birth to the acquisition, I felt it as a painful weight which depressed my mind, and from which to be free I would have given the world had I possessed it. But having communicated the letter to Mr. Howard, he represented it to me in a juster point of view; tho' in reading it to himself I observed that he blushed indignant at the unfeeling hints with which the epistle is interspersed.

I ought to consider, he said, that the obligation of soliciting this annuity was inferior to the claims, which in my present situation justice alone, independent of humanity, gave me upon my relations; and that as an acquittal of the great debt owing me from their kindness and attention, this salary had doubtless been procured, which was evidently designed to extinguish all future expectations.

As Mr. Howard perceived however that I was vexed and ashamed, and as
yet

yet undetermined how to act, delicacy made him forbear any other advice on the subject than merely that which I had at first solicited and which naturally resulted from reading the letter; and as my happiness and advantage were the sole ideas that dictated his sentiments, he thought these acquirements would not readily be the production of a measure which even in prospect gave birth to such uneasiness. He therefore concluded, with a feeling peculiar to his disposition, it must be confessed that our good sister's notions of affluence are not the most romantic in the world; therefore while she thought she possessed the power of procuring you what she herself esteems the chief good in life, and which no doubt bestows many valuable and rational gratifications, she scrupled not by what means the advantage was gained, tho' a little more delicacy exerted in the transaction had probably given it a very different

rent aspect to what it now wears. However she meant all for the best, tho' it cannot be denied that to talk to her of ease, comfort, and compleat independence on forty or fifty pounds a year, is to present different shades of colour before eyes whose organs have been from infancy impaired. Indeed the happy disposition that gives existence to such sentiments, is beyond, infinitely beyond the reach of adverse fortune; and is in itself a blessing which no worldly acquisitions can confer.

By praise so delicate, Mr. Howard laboured to convince me, that however I should determine, his opinion should follow mine; and that if my resolution was to give way to pique, and to reject this seeming compromise with my family, he on his part should rather applaud than blame the spirit that induced me to refuse a favor, which, however otherwise advantageous, overwhelmed me with mortifi-

mortification. Yet it was not difficult to discern, that he might be apt to consider my rejection as an absurdity to which false delicacy and offended pride alone gave rise; and when on the other hand I coolly reflected that my finances were by no means ascertained, that it was not quite impossible amidst the chapter of accidents from which they had already suffered severely but that I might really one day become dependent on the worthy Mr. Howard and my sister, a situation I could indeed but ill brook, I resolved to conquer my reluctance and yield to necessity; tho' my heart rose against my judgment, and had I been alone I should have indulged in tears, which indeed were not wholly restrained even in Mr. Howard's presence, at sight of the bill.

Oh! Sophia! what steps were to be taken here, in this most cruel of all circumstances?—To return it instantly without doubt. But how conceal from

the generous donor that I was acquainted from whence it came. Since Mrs. Hindon could not retain *his* secret, tho' so powerfully urged and intreated, how could I possibly flatter myself that she would pay greater regard to mine. I had no path to pursue that had not been attempted by him without success; however on some plan I was obliged suddenly to determine. I therefore sat down to my bureau without loss of time to answer her letter.

I thanked her in terms warmer than were my feelings, tho' I fear my coldness will surprize her, for the interest and trouble she has taken in this business; but re-enclosed the bill, which I besought her to return to the right owner, informing him that even as her gift, I could not possibly prevail with myself to accept of it.

I have asked the favor of Mr. Howard to thank Mr. Roatsley by letter in his
sister's

sister's name for the interest he has taken in her concerns. I think I can do no less. An obligation may wound a proud spirit, but the testimonial of a proper gratitude cannot hurt an ingenuous one.

There is one circumstance, material and interesting, in Mrs. Hindon's letter, on which I have not yet touched, but which I conjecture will not pass unnoticed even by you, and as for me, it has employed my thoughts day and night ever since it reached me: Roatsley, she tells me, appears to have been kept hitherto in utter ignorance with regard to our unlucky transactions with his mother, and to be wholly unacquainted with the rejected application to our grandfather. Though how particulars of such importance in the family should have been concealed from his knowledge it is impossible to conjecture. There is indeed a mystery in this affair which Mr. Howard, Fanny, and myself, attempt in vain to unravel. Is

it too fanciful to imagine that Lady Linrose, fearing the known generosity of her amiable son's disposition might lead him to act against the wishes of Lord Belmont, may have determined on keeping him wholly in ignorance. I am bewildered in a variety of imaginary opinions, and not a little secretly delighted at finding myself enabled to exculpate him from those charges of pride and duplicity, which in spite of a too insinuating partiality, have sometimes painfully recurred to my mind.

Can it be, my Sophia! that Roatsley has been so long ignorant, and what is equally astonishing and unaccountable, has been informed from the lips of Mrs. Hindon only, that we are so nearly allied by the ties of blood? Yet what are these ties? how weak, how insufficient alone either to produce friendship or to excite esteem or admiration! The connection is indeed productive of satisfaction, merely

merely from the idea that it is a foundation for intercourse and a pretext for intimacy. I think however, even in common politeness, he ought to have appeared less dejected than he did upon the discovery. His silence and embarrassment during our last interview evidently confess what little satisfaction he derived from the information.

I have been reading Mrs. Hindon's letter once more ; and tho' shock'd at the indelicacy too visibly expressed in almost every line, now that I am cool there are some passages in it which do not wholly displease me. How feeling, how considerate, how noble, has been Roatsley's conduct. His heart is indeed open to every call of distress, and to every sentiment of compassion. How amiable is his delicacy compared to that of his partner in the generous transaction. It pains me not, nay I should be gratified, to receive an obligation from my cousin, dis-

tinged from the sordid and humiliating consideration of money matters. The anxiety and trouble therefore which were exerted on this occasion, dilate my heart and animate my gratitude. I am alone hurt that the representations of my officious agent were dictated with so little judgment as to excite his pity, and so little refinement as to mortify my feelings. To this was owing the distressing and unsuccessful attempt to wound me still more severely by pecuniary favours.

I have received a letter from Miss Parsons, who promised at parting sometimes to let me hear from her. She tells us that she is now most agreeably settled in that line, for which she regarded herself as best qualified to earn her own independent subsistence, and that she is to quit Mrs. Hindon's in a few days, who has been much displeased with the ingratitude of her conduct towards so kind a relation :

relation: these are the good lady's own words.

The lady with whom she was in terms, held her determination suspended as I told you, on account of some point on which Miss Parsons did not answer her wishes; but on that deserving young woman's offering her services in person, she was so much pleased with her appearance, as to wave all deficiencies, and closed immediately with her terms. Pray who do you imagine this lady has turned out to be? no other than Lady Linrose herself: and Miss Parsons at this moment actually makes one of her family.

H. SEYMOUR.

LETTER XV.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

APRIL 2.

I Have been ill and unfit for writing for some days past ; and tho' still feeble and dejected, I hasten to that soothing relief which pouring our anxieties into the bosom of friendship ever bestows, even in the most ditressful situations.

Mr. Howard, rambling over his grounds the other evening as it began to grow dusk, perceived on the high road at the foot of the hill, a carriage and four driving with great vehemence, as if desirous of arriving at the end of its journey before night should render travelling, in the

the present state of the weather, dangerous as well as uncomfortable. A period however was but too soon put to their career, by a most alarming accident: the axle-tree all at once gave way, and the coach was suddenly overset with a violence which made Mr. Howard, who was at no great distance, tremble for the lives of the unfortunate travellers.

He flew instantly to their assistance; and found they consisted of a lady and her maid, attended by two footmen on horseback, who were endeavouring to pull the unlucky Abigail out of the shattered equipage. This, with the aid of Mr. Howard, was, tho' with difficulty, effected: but they soon perceived that the situation of the girl was infinitely less deplorable than the condition in which they beheld the poor lady, who lay without motion at the bottom of the coach, her head and arm cut severely by the

glasses, her face covered with blood, and apparently dead.

Having lifted her out of the coach, Mr. Howard, assisted by the maid, who forgot her own sufferings in her terror for her lady, wiped the blood from her face, endeavoured to stop its effusions with her handkerchief, plentifully besprinkled her with water, which a late fall of snow abundantly supplied on all sides; and having administered the aid of eau de luce, sal volatile, &c. the poor lady, to their unspeakable joy, at length opened her eyes.

As soon as she was sufficiently recovered, Mr. Howard informed her that his house was not above a quarter of a mile from the spot, and that every assistance could there be speedily procured to alleviate her own sufferings and those of her maid; and besought her to allow him to help her into his own little carriage, for which he had dispatched one of the footmen

men at the moment of his coming up, and which was now arrived. This conveyance was by no means suited to the present exigency, being a one horse chair, the only equipage this family boasts of. In this, assisted by the attendants, Mr. Howard placed the unfortunate lady, and slowly approached the house.

I have brought you an unexpected guest, my dear, cried Mr. Howard, as he entered, supporting the feeble unfortunate; but would to heaven we had been introduced to the honour of her acquaintance in circumstances less unhappy, for she has met with a most alarming accident and is severely hurt.

Fanny received her with that cordial kindness to which her situation so justly laid claim. The surgeon, who had been sent for from the village adjoining, on examining her bruises declared that one of her arms was dislocated, and that there was a fracture of one of the small bones
near

near the wrist. The unfortunate lady immediately underwent the necessary operations; but the groans which her agony excited rendered us incapable of remaining near her.

At length however her acute sufferings were over. The operator departed, having enjoined the strictest attention to quiet and rest, and my sister and I were again admitted into her apartment to see every thing prepared by Therese, her own maid being unable to attend her. We then returned to the parlour, not a little eager to be made acquainted with the name of our lovely guest, a point in which we still remained ignorant.

Mr. Howard instantly gratified our curiosity; having learnt from the servants that their lady was the Countess of Aubrey, and that they were on their way to her country residence in the next county, when this unfortunate accident put a period for the present to their journey. He
informed

informed us likewise that he had sent an express to Sir William Meredith, (whose lady was Lady Aubrey's nearest relation, and tenderly attached to her, and who would be miserable, the girl said, if absent from her lady at a juncture so critical), acquainting him with this unfortunate event, and requesting that he and Lady Meredith would take up their residence at Hubert Hill till all alarm respecting Lady Aubrey was at an end.

This accident you may suppose, by interesting our compassion so powerfully, had discomposed us not a little, and wholly interrupted the social tranquillity in which our evenings are usually spent.

Mr. Howard in particular was uncommonly grave, and testified an anxiety, which, had not the singular humanity of his disposition been well known to me, might have created suspicion. I am very apprehensive, said he, for the life of Lady Aubrey. Her delicacy of frame
seems

seems but ill calculated for sustaining an accident of this kind, and too much caution cannot be pursued.

The consequence too powerfully justified his alarm: about three in the morning I was suddenly awakened by Therese, who hastily drew aside my curtain. Ah! Mademoiselle! said she, *la pauvre dame est tres mal.*

She then informed me that her Ladyship had been excessively unquiet all the night, and so low spirited, that apparently worn out by restlessness and pain, she at length burst into tears; and telling Therese she could not rest, ordered her to bring a light into her chamber as she found sleeping impossible.

The girl entreated her to swallow a few drops in some water, to which she consented; and giving over all thoughts of repose, she had her curtains drawn aside, and tried to beguile the tedious hours of midnight by entering into conversation
with

with Thereſe; who poſſeſſes all the loquacity of her nation, and who, from encountering few of her equals to whom ſhe can talk, ſeizes with avidity every opportunity ſhe can lay hold of to indemnify herſelf for the painful penance of ſilence, by making reprisals upon thoſe who underſtand her language.

Her Ladyſhip, ſhe ſaid, had made many enquiries about my ſiſter and me, to whoſe humanity and hoſpitality ſhe often repeated ſhe owed her life; and the girl was in hopes ſhe found herſelf ſomewhat eaſier, when ſhe was ſeized all at once with a fit ſo violent and alarming, that Thereſe was obliged to call up her own maid to her aſſiſtance; and tho' ſhe is now rather more compoſed, continued ſhe, I am afraid Madame's fever is extremely high. She talks very incoherently, mutters to herſelf in a manner truly frightful, and juſt now inſiſts on riſing and being dreſſed.

This

This information made me hastily get up; and unwilling to disturb my sister, who of late has been rather indisposed, I threw my wrapping gown over me, and ordering Mr. Rudder, the surgeon, to be instantly sent for, I stole softly into Lady Aubrey's apartment, and approaching the bed, where her maid was unwillingly assisting her to rise, I enquired how she found herself; but oh! Sophia! how shall I find words by which to convey to you an idea of the sensations which overpowered me? Is it in language to furnish expressions adequate to those feelings which overwhelmed my senses, when the amiable, the unfortunate Lady Aubrey, with a frantic violence that eluded all opposition, suddenly springing from the bed, threw herself at my feet, and embracing my knees, exclaimed in accents which froze my blood—oh! my Lord! my beloved Lord Linrose! for the sake of heaven do not frown upon me so terribly:

ribly. Your looks stab me to the soul! you terrify me my Lord!—oh! have mercy upon me!—I was dear to you once!—did you not say so?—and I have long, long forgiven you all you have made me endure.

I heard no more, but fell senseless on the ground.

Therese and the woman, terrified at the unaccountable scene before them, flew to our assistance; and while the one ineffectually administered hartshorn and other volatile restoratives to me, the other entreated her distracted lady to suffer herself to be again undrest and to return to bed: and so quickly does insanity change the object of its interest and pursuit, that forgetting the idea which had but a moment before so violently agitated her bosom, she allowed herself to be again put to bed, and yielding to weakness, was for some time tolerably still and composed.

Finding

Finding in the mean while that I shewed no symptoms of recovery, These in terror awakened my sister, who flew half dressed into the room just as I had opened my eyes and began to recollect my situation.

A seasonable flood of tears in some measure relieved the anguish of my feelings, and allayed Fanny's apprehensions of a relapse; and with her assistance, I summoned strength sufficient to quit Lady Aubrey's chamber, where the sound of her voice repeating in the most melancholy accents my father's name, and breathing her soft and heart breaking complaints at his cruelty and detestation, threw me into agonies unspeakable.

Fanny, who was yet unacquainted with the cause of my agitation, and who having been merely informed that Lady Aubrey was delirious, in her anxiety on my account had not attended to the incoherencies that fell from her lips, eagerly

gerly poured upon me, the moment we left it, a thousand enquiries respecting the occasion of the fit with which I had been seized. I was unable to satisfy her; and felt relieved by the entrance of Mr. Howard, whose countenance informed me that to him at least the task of disclosing it was unnecessary.

For heavens sake, my dearest sister, compose yourself, cried Mr. Howard. The pain of this affecting incident I might have prevented, had I dreaded or foreseen an explanation so distressing and abrupt: but the apprehension of inflicting an unnecessary wound deterred me from an information which I was well qualified to have given the instant Lady Aubrey's name reached my ears.

What information? cried Fanny. You frighten me, tho' without knowing why. I perceive this lady is one of our relations: but why should the knowledge of that circumstance wound or distress us.

If

If you will promise me, my dear, not to be too much affected——

For heavens sake tell me to what all this preparation tends ?

I am just going to do so, said he, taking her hand ; and I hope you will not be alarmed when I desire you to recall to mind an unfortunate lady, whose name frequently occurs in the packet once entrusted to my care—Miss Marsdon.

Good God ! is it possible ! Can Lady Aubrey be in fact that miserable, that ill fated woman : and subdued by a crowd of melancholy ideas, Fanny melted into tears ; but frightened to witness the still superior anguish of my feelings, she forgot her own distress to soothe mine.

Oh ! my dearest Hermione ! cried she, do not give way to this agitation. You will distract me. Consider, my love, that time must have long since greatly allayed Lady Aubrey's sufferings. Those of our dear, dear father, are happily

pily lulled to perpetual rest. He is now disengaged from all the pains and sorrows of the world, and this accidental rencontre ought not too severely to affect us.

The apprehension of alarming her made me exert myself to assume a composure to which I could not so speedily attain; but revolving in my mind all the circumstances that had occurred since Lady Aubrey's arrival, it was not difficult for me to trace the cause of the melancholy delirium with which she had been seized, nor of that sudden burst of grief that so wholly overpowered her the instant I was presented to her sight; and which, tho' it seemed to us the natural consequence of depression and uneasiness, had undoubtedly its source in my resemblance to my father, which has been ever deemed strikingly remarkable, and which must have overwhelmed her, even at the first moment, with some slight suspicion of my being in fact one of those daughters

daughters of whose existence I can hardly imagine she has remained wholly ignorant; and her conversation with the loquacious Therese, a conversation possibly designed to ascertain her doubts, pouring undeniable conviction on her mind at a moment of fatigue, pain, and indisposition, no wonder that such a conflict of emotions co-operating with her late accident, should have disordered her imagination.

Upon interrogating Therese more minutely, I find these conjectures strongly corroborated. Tho' sighs and tears, she says, often burst from the unfortunate invalid, her expressions were distinct, and to all appearance her reason clear, till after midnight; when calling Therese to the side of her bed, she enquired into a thousand particulars relating to her two ladies. Were they lately arrived from abroad? in what part of the continent did they usually reside? did they give
into

into the gaieties of M——, (within sixty miles of which place Therese had told her we lived,) or did we prefer the retirement of the country? on all of which Therese was sufficiently communicative.

Late in the evening Lady Meredith arrived. All this day Lady Aubrey continued in the most dangerous way. Her fever seemed rather on the encrease, tho' already so violent that she had not had one interval of returning recollection, but raved with unceasing and dreadful incoherency since the moment of my sudden appearance.

During this time you may easily judge what were my sensations. The weight on my spirits was indeed insupportable. Regarding Lady Aubrey in the light of a woman for whom my beloved parent had suffered so much—the woman who loved and had endured so much for him—my heart became attached to her by a strong and irresistible impulse of affection, and
I could

I could not but feel deeply interested in a life which was once so dear to him. Anxiety, and a respect almost filial, urged me to watch with eager sedulity the turn of her fever, and to administer with my own hands the prescriptions ordered by the physicians who were called in to her assistance: but wholly overcome by the incoherent ravings of her delirium, no sooner was I seated by her bed side than my feelings rendered me incapable of remaining in silence and composure, and I was obliged to fly to another apartment for the relief of weeping aloud and at liberty.

My sister and Mr. Howard intreated me to spare myself the anguish of a scene so dreadful; but when it became insupportable, I made my escape, and while I preserved fortitude sufficient for the task, I felt a secret idea of duty which recompenced me for the pain of my attendance.

Sir

Sir William Meredith was prevented from accompanying his lady by a fit of the gout. Her terrors on account of her niece were indeed extreme. She wept violently on alighting, and possessed hardly resolution sufficient for listening to the particulars of her accident.

The countenance of the physician feelingly told how much was to be dreaded, All I can in conscience tell you, Madam, said Doctor Harding to Lady Meredith, is, that you will not remain long in the misery of suspense. One way or other it must soon be decided.

This day, alas! has produced no symptom in the least favorable. Lady Aubrey continues to endure all the restless turbulence of delirium, is in continual motion, shifts an uneasy posture perpetually without finding one that bestows more relief, and is sometimes obliged to be detained by force from leaving her bed. She talks incessantly; and tho' her

repose the perturbation and anxiety of her spirits allowed.

This interval has been a period of real anguish to me. All the horrors of my father's sufferings and misfortunes, this wonderful and unexpected incident has renewed in my mind with augmented poignancy; and that gloomy impression which the soothing hand of time, the habit of frequent reflexion, and the consideration of his transition, I trust, to a happier world, had in some measure effaced, this accidental meeting has restored with redoubled violence, attended if possible with encreased depression.

Mr. Howard and Fanny having insisted on my relinquishing an attendance which the presence of Lady Meredith rendered unnecessary, and which, ignorant of the secret and singular tie that binds my heart to that of the unfortunate Lady Aubrey might be deemed officious by her aunt, I have strictly forborn ever

since her arrival to enter the apartment; and so powerfully has my sensibility strengthened by this forbearance, that had my assistance been required I scarce think I could have summoned resolution sufficient for encountering the hazard of again hearing my father's name pronounced in the heart rending accents of the mournful invalid. Even now, that her reason and recollection, through the mercy of Heaven, are restored, I look forward with inexpressible apprehension to the idea of once more meeting her eyes. The pang this interview must occasion to her bosom, the pain with which it must overwhelm mine even in anticipation, agitates me beyond expression.

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APRIL 17.

Lady Aubrey is much better. She now merely retains that languor and depression

pression which indisposition, independent of dejection, invariably leaves behind as a memento of its power.

Lady Meredith, who is a most amiable and agreeable woman, now happily delivered from the painful anxiety that oppressed her, gives us at times, when she can be spared from her attendance on her niece, a good deal of her company, and expresses in the warmest terms her gratitude for our attention to Lady Aubrey.

APRIL 20.

As yet Lady Aubrey, who is now able to sit up, or rather to recline on the sofa for some hours every day, has expressed no desire for an interview with either my sister or myself, and the longer this meeting is delayed the more formidable it appears. It is but too probable,

bable, indeed, that she views it with equal apprehension, and willingly lays hold of the pretence of indisposition to defer a conference which must be productive of so much pain and embarrassment to all parties.

I think it not unlikely, that perceiving the obscurity that is thrown over our situation, the borrowed name we have assumed, the retirement in which we live, and the total alienation which has taken place between us and my uncle's family, she may be led to conclude our real rank in life a secret even to ourselves, or at least may be induced to suspect that the circumstances of our birth are but partially known to us; those particulars especially in which she herself is immediately concerned, she may naturally conjecture the least liable of any to have reached our ears. In this case, as all explanation upon our meeting is out of the question, part of the awkwardness of
the

the scene will be avoided, and I am labouring to think of it with a composure that shall enable me, when it takes place, to behave with the calm indifference of an unconcerned person.

APRIL 25.

Last night Lady Meredith delivered to us a message from Lady Aubrey, intimating that her Ladyship had been for some days past beyond measure anxious to return us personally her grateful acknowledgments for that benevolent hospitality to which she had been so infinitely indebted; but that the weak state of her nerves rendering her liable to be seized with agitation, and discomposed by the most trifling occurrences, Lady Meredith had persuaded her into compliance with the injunctions of her physicians, which were on no account

to hazard any risk of being disordered or disturbed in her present feeble condition; finding herself now, however, much recruited both in strength and spirits, she hoped in a day or two to be well enough to ask the favour of a visit from us in her dressing room, and in the mean while recommended herself, with many kind and polite expressions, to our good wishes.

APRIL 28.

This formidable interview is at last over. Oh! Sophia! I did not imagine it more formidable than it proved.

This morning Lady Meredith came down to the parlour, for she seldom gratifies us with her company till dinner, and requested, in Lady Aubrey's name, the favour of my sister's company and mine above stairs. My heart beat violently

lently at this message. I felt myself change colour; and involuntarily sat down on the first chair so evidently discomposed, that Lady Meredith concluded I was ill, and said with much kindness, 'tis fortunate, my dear Miss Seymour, that I would not be prevailed with to accept of your most obliging offer of sharing my fatigue and attendance upon my niece, for I should have undoubtedly suspected that you had suffered for your humanity. I am certain you are indisposed. Pray allow me to feel your pulse; for you must know I am reckoned an able physician by the poor people around our seat in the country. You are feverish I am convinced, and must nurse yourself for a day or two.

I assured her I was perfectly well; but she would not give immediate credit to my assertion, and entreated my sister to prevail with me to allow of the physician's attendance. Finding however that we

both made light of the proposal, she left us to prepare her niece for our appearance, who was so feeble and exhausted, that a trifle she said discomposed her spirits, and threw her into a tremor.

Alas! Sophia, this interview, though a circumstance of no moment in the eyes of Lady Meredith, was by no means a trifle to the unfortunate Lady Aubrey; and so wholly did the prospect of it overpower her feelings, that her aunt returned to us in a few minutes with an apology and request that we would be so kind as to defer our visit till the evening, as she found herself languid and oppressed, and meant to lie down for an hour or two.

I felt relieved by this short respite; and in the mean while endeavoured to prepare myself for the approaching period with a composure that might wholly confute any suspicions she might entertain of my being conscious of the interesting

resting and melancholy events that form a connexion so singular between us. As for my sister, her emotions, naturally less uncontrollable, at least after the first moments of agitation, I was under no apprehension that she would betray herself; and by preserving if possible an air of serenity myself, I hoped to render this meeting less affecting to Lady Aubrey, who by that means would be spared the painful reflections which our mutual perturbation might otherwise occasion.

In the evening, Lady Meredith returned again into the parlour. I am come once more, said she, to ask the favour of your company in Lady Aubrey's dressing room. She is by no means well to-day; and I am so apprehensive of a relapse, that I would have persuaded her to defer your visit till to-morrow, and go to rest early; but her heart is so bent upon the pleasure of seeing you, that I fear opposition would prove more
hurtful

hurtful than the flutter of spirits which the sight of a new face in the present weak state of her nerves may occasion. I however shall remain below, and enjoy a *tete a tete* with Mr. Howard, that we may not prove too many at once for her.

We accordingly went up stairs. The dressing room windows had been darkened with blinds, under pretence that the light was offensive, but doubtless with the intention of concealing an emotion for which the inadequate allegation of debility and recent indisposition only could be given. Lovely even in sickness, she reclined on a sofa; from which, the moment we appeared, she made a feeble attempt to rise; but finding herself incapable of effecting it, she fell back in evident discomposure, and holding out a hand to each, burst into tears.

All my resolution forsook me at that moment. Beholding her the victim of
those

those calamities which had wholly embittered the declining days of my father—calamities which she still lived to deplore, and evidently felt at that instant with all the agony of recent and bitter disappointment, my heart melted with sympathetic sorrow, and forgetting the composure I had laboured to obtain, I pressed her offered hand to my lips with an enthusiastic fervour which told as plainly as words could have done that I partook in the griefs that oppressed her disconsolate bosom. This language was indeed too expressive not to be instantly comprehended, for raising herself by a sudden effort, she clasped me in her arms, and supporting her head on my shoulder, sobbed aloud..

Terrified at the violence of her emotions, I would have broke from her to have called Lady Meredith; but redoubling her caresses, do not leave me, cried she the moment she could articulate—

tears

tears are habitual to me, and those I shed at this moment are produced by sensations which have not often, alas! found entrance into my heart. Let not this agitation frighten you, added she. It's vehemence will in time abate. The Almighty, I trust, sends you to me for my consolation and support. She was unable to proceed; but disengaging herself from my embraces, she stretched out her arms to Fanny, who flew into them drowned in tears.

For heavens sake, dearest Madam, cried she, for I was unable to speak, endeavour to compose yourself; for your own sake and for ours try to be calm. Many, many days of happiness are yet I hope in store for us all. Your friendship and affection is alone able to constitute our felicity; and it will be the delight of our lives if you will honour us so far as to flatter us with the hopes of being enabled, from the solicitude of the tenderest

tendrest regard and most filial affection, in some slight degree to contribute to your's.

Alarmed for the consequences of this scene, and afraid lest the frankness of Fanny's disposition should lead her in the height of her emotions to touch on particulars much too delicate for the present moment, I ran to the door to call Lady Meredith, whose presence I imagined would put a period to a conversation that was about to become much too interesting to all parties, and which in the precarious state of Lady Aubrey's health might prove exceedingly hurtful to a frame so infinitely delicate; but perceiving my intention, she entreated me to sit down by her, and having swallowed some drops in water, she became somewhat more composed.

I trust in heaven, said she, again taking my hand and obliging Fanny to seat herself upon the sofa, that there are
days

days of returning peace yet in store for me, since the Almighty has been pleased in his gracious providence to vouchsafe me, by means so unexpected and extraordinary, the gratification of that eager wish, in which has been centered all my hopes and expectations of satisfaction on this side the grave; for know, my amiable young friends, continued she in accents interrupted by tears, that you have been ever since—(her voice failed her,) ever since my return to England, the subject of my thoughts—of my very dreams—and the unceasing source of my anxious but ineffectual pursuit. Poor Mr. Bensley! He was the firm and unalterable friend of both. His steady and inflexible attachment no circumstances could change, no reverses could shake, while he remained convinced, continued she clasping her hands together with an energy the most affecting, that there still lay concealed within the secret recesses of the

the heart, a hidden and obscured, yet fervent sentiment of virtue, which called for the soothing hand of friendship to guard it from distraction and despair.

You will not wonder, Sophia, that the conclusion of this speech, by overwhelming me with the complicated sensations of astonishment, admiration, sorrow, and delight, should wholly overpower my feelings. Utterance was denied me: yet words, had I been able to command them, could have but feebly expressed the tumult of contending emotions that agitated my bosom. Throwing myself on my knees before the injured Lady Aubrey, I dissolved into tears; and while I kissed her hand and pressed it to my heart, my looks and my distress told her how much I venerated and admired her. Oh, Sophia! had you beheld the lovely unfortunate at that moment, you must have adored her.

She

She embraced me with the tenderest emotion; and I then reiterated my intreaties that she would allow us to leave her. But while she detained me feebly by the hand, she requested Fanny to remove the blinds, which now almost wholly obscured the declining rays of the evening, and fixing her eyes steadily for an instant on my face, tears again began to flow, and sighing with an expression the most mournful, she bade us good night. You may conclude that my sister and I could not speedily recover the appearance of composure. Yet affecting as this interview had proved, a mixture of somewhat soothing and consolatory has insinuated itself amidst the bitterness of more poignant sensations. By a wonderful interposition of Providence, we had been introduced to the knowledge of one of the most amiable of her sex, who not only felt inclined to accord us her friendship and affection, but

but who was already our friend, who returned with fervor the warm attachment our hearts had imbibed almost the first moment that she was presented to our view, and the bitter recollection of whose past calamities our assiduous attention might prove the fortunate means of soothing into tranquillity. These reflections were of the most pleasing nature, and grateful to our hearts; yet were they but ill calculated for wiping the tears from our eyes: on the contrary, by melting every sensation into tenderness we were almost exhausted with weeping, when Mr. Howard came to seek us in my dressing room, where we had taken refuge in hopes of acquiring that composure which our *tete a tete* had banished still further than ever from our minds.

He kissed a hand of each, and telling us that supper waited, and that Lady Meredith was already in the parlour, we
tried

tried to assume smiling faces, and deferring any account of our affecting interview till a more convenient opportunity, accompanied him down stairs.

On our entrance, and during supper, Lady Meredith's countenance betrayed an expression of grave reserve so different from the frank and open familiarity of manner which since the relief of her anxiety had seemed the characteristic of her mind, that I instantly perceived she had been but recently informed of particulars, which probably the agitation of Lady Aubrey's spirits had discovered to her only an hour or two before. Painful as it was both to witness this change and to suspect the cause, I made large allowances for the prejudice which induced her to regard us with repugnance. That Lady Meredith should behold with disgust, the offspring of him whose name in all probability she merely knew as the source of misery to her beloved niece,
and

and with whose subsequent agonies of remorse she may be wholly ignorant, is not surprising, when such considerations have had power to outweigh in the scale of paternal affection every motive of humanity, compassion, and even duty. Yes, Sophia, even duty: for rigid as Lord Belmont's sense of integrity is reported to be, in regard to us, a mistaken notion of honour sways his conduct. It is for minds like the angelic Lady Aubrey's only to prove superior to such sentiments, to wave personal injuries, to discard private resentment, and to forget her own feelings and sufferings in her pity and affection for the penitent author of her calamities.

As Mr. Howard during supper had conversed on indifferent subjects, and Lady Meredith with an air of unusual ceremony seemed determined to follow his lead, the mortifying coldness of her manner deterred me from finding courage

rage to ask how Lady Aubrey found herself, and indeed I dreaded trusting my voice with the enquiry. However when the servants had retired, Mr. Howard saved me the trouble.

My niece tells me she is no worse, answered she coldly; but she is extremely low spirited; and the slightest agitation in her present weak condition may be fatal to a frame so exhausted as her's. I own I am under great uneasiness about her: the apprehension of a relapse terrifies me.

A relapse! cried I in a tone which betrayed my emotion, heaven forbid! or we shall never forgive ourselves; and leaning my head upon my hand, I found myself unable longer to preserve the appearance of the tranquillity I had endeavoured to assume.

Mr. Howard made me swallow a second glass of Madeira; and Lady Meredith seemed so affected with my tears,
that

that pressing my hand with even more than her accustomed kindness, all coldness, prejudice, and reserve, seemed instantly to give way to the kindest sympathy and most soothing compassion. Compose yourself, my dear Miss Seymour, cried she; my apprehensions have been always accused of greatly magnifying every impending danger. It is apprehension only, thank God, that leads me to speak in a tone of such despondency. Lady Aubrey assures me, that far from being hurt by the late interview, it has soothed and gratified her heart; and even had the violence of her feelings, naturally acute, exhausted her a little for the present, from the kindred sensibility of your sympathetic hearts, I foresee in future infinite satisfaction and consolation to my unfortunate niece in the unexpected happiness of your friendship and society.

The subject was too delicate to admit
of

of more, and soon after we separated for the night.

This morning, when we met at breakfast, Lady Meredith paid us her compliments with much kindness, and the appearance of revived spirits. Her niece, she said, her beloved niece, (for she seldom mentions her without some epithet expressive of affection) had enjoyed an excellent night's rest, and found herself much refreshed, so I hope in God, Miss Seymour, all our fears were wholly groundless.

On her Ladyship's leaving us immediately after breakfast, Mr. Howard informed us that he had had a long walk with her in the morning, for she is an early riser, and that it had been productive of a very interesting conversation; in the course of which he had picked up some particulars relative to Lady Aubrey that he was certain we must be eager to learn.

Lady

Lady Meredith, he said, had entirely contradicted the report, so universally circulated and so generally credited, of Lady Aubrey's insanity. A fever of the most alarming nature had indeed attacked her brain, and held her life for many weeks suspended; but this was the natural consequence of her misfortunes. Returning reason had been the immediate follower of recruited health: and tho' the most mournful depression had wholly banished tranquillity and peace from her bosom, religion the most devout, and resignation the most humble and sincere, had supported her in the height of misery, and had preserved her from the baneful effects of distraction and despair.

When her ill fated marriage took place, she had been but a few weeks in England. She had spent her life abroad, where Lord Embdon had acted at the Court of Turin in a public capacity. She had hitherto enjoyed little personal inter-

course with her numerous relations, and was particularly attached to none of them. Her native country, endeared to her neither by the force of private friendship nor by the insinuating remembrance of early prepossession, it was the inevitable and natural effects of her misfortunes to be disgusted with it, and her departure was a step which delicacy, pride, and affliction, all conspired to dictate.

The death of Lord Embdon, which happened at this juncture, (a stroke which it is to be hoped his weakly constitution rather than his child's calamities had inflicted,) involved the unfortunate daughter in accumulated distress. Thank heaven he died of a complaint wherein the spirits are not supposed by medical people to influence the disorder. He had been for many years afflicted with the stone; and refusing to submit to an operation, fell a sacrifice to that painful disease.

This

This event, while it dissolved her only remaining tie to England, left her wholly at liberty to pursue her intended scheme of future seclusion. Her grandfather, the old Earl of Aubrey, indeed still survived, and beheld the ruined peace of his family with the weeping eye of a parent. He entreated his grand daughter, the heiress of his possessions, not to desert him in his old age ; but as she well knew that an hereditary regard for the successor of his name and titles alone dictated this request, and that wholly governed by a woman who had lived with him for years, his heart but feebly retained the impressions of natural affection, her sense of duty did not interfere with the prosecution of her intentions.

She therefore bade adieu to England ; and having for a short time boarded herself and attendants in the quiet retirement of a monastery, she from thence enquired after an obscure but elegant re-

treat, which an early and tender friendship for its deceased possessor had endeared to her remembrance; and having purchased it from the present owner, she retired thither with the design of secluding herself for ever from the world.

When this resolution was formed, Miss Marsdon was but eighteen, and possessed in the full glow of radiance those charms which dejection, disappointment, and indisposition, for fifteen years more, have scarce been able to impair. Her days, bounded by distress, the dreary prospect admitted no ray of reviving consolation except what resulted from the society of one dear and maternal friend, who having been lately deprived of the husband of her heart, and never having been blessed with offspring, flew to indulge with her favorite young friend the unbounded luxury of sorrow.

Madame de St. Hillaire, for some time combated not the intended seclusion
of

of her amiable friend. But the violence of her own distress yielding to resignation and composure, she became conscious that tho' grief is seldom abated by reasoning the most convincing and judicious, time will infallibly lessen, and variety in some measure divert, it's bitterness. Her feelings, tho' poignant, were soothing and enthusiastic: tears unceasingly fell from her eyes; but they were tears of relief. Some pleasing recollection, some scene, interesting and endearing, often made them flow, and the luxuriant reveries of past delight in a great measure soothed the present sad reverse.

Far otherwise was the source of the bitter anguish of her friend. The remembrance of past affection carried a sting which made her in horror fly from the thought; and the idea that the man she had loved and had lost was torn from her arms by the common stroke of death, supported not her feeling mind in the

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height

height of languor and depression : all was misery unmitigated : the past was horror, and the future presented only undeserved mortification and perpetual regret.

In solitude and obscurity were centered the only ideas of dejected tranquillity that could find entrance into the bosom of the fair mourner : a bosom of acute sensibility, chilled by the cold hand of disappointment : but her anxious friend, reflecting on her youth and amiable disposition, hoped that after time had been given for meliorating her sorrows into peaceful resignation, a temper so calculated for the active duties of benevolence would not remain unsubdued by the heartfelt gratifications which that noble principle affords, and foresaw that it would not prove impossible to prevail with her to relax in her present system.

Time justified the predictions of this valuable friend. By degrees, at her earnest entreaties, a select acquaintance
was

was admitted; and altho' through the whole of Lady Aubrey's residence abroad, till the present moment, a weight of melancholy impaired her health and clouded her spirits, religion and principle co-operating with the continual efforts of Madame de St. Hillaire, greatly softened the first anguish of her sufferings; and while she remained incapable of participating in the gaieties of life, its rational comforts were restored to her relish. Her society, tho' limited, was elegant, and judiciously chosen; and her solitary residence at length began to wear the aspect of a peaceful retirement, which the sad stroke of Madame de St. Hillaire's death, added to the dying request of her grandfather, would probably alone have prevailed with Lady Aubrey ever to have quitted.

Lord Aubrey, finding the infirmities of age overtake him with a hasty pace, the beginning of this year sent an earnest

H 4

intreaty

intreaty to his grand daughter to grant him the satisfaction of beholding once more the last and only supporter of his family and dignities. She hesitated not to obey, however painfully her return to England must awaken every source of anguish, and arrived in London about the end of January, just in time to receive his last injunctions, the old Lord having survived this affecting meeting only a few days.

Lady Aubrey now found herself possessed of the accumulated wealth of a long line of noble and opulent ancestry. Independent of those estates which from entail were annexed to the title, her grandfather had left her considerable property; and he requested that a due regard to an ancient and honourable family, of which she was the head and ornament, might prevail with her to spend her days in the old family castle; where her predecessors had lived time immemorial,

rial, adored by their vassals, respected by their friends, and the pride and blessing of the country around.

In addition to these particulars, Lady Meredith mentioned to Mr. Howard, that though from several circumstances which on recollection strike her remembrance, she conjectures her amiable niece wished her to be made acquainted with the singular event of her rencontre with this family, never could she summon courage and calmness sufficient for entering on the painful subject till yesterday evening, when the violence of her emotions rendering her aunt at once suspicious and inquisitive, drew the formidable secret from her bosom.

Tho' tenderly attached to my niece, said Lady Meredith, the only surviving child of a deceased sister whom I almost idolized, I have not had the happiness, till her late return from abroad, of enjoying much of her company. She has

H 5 spent

spent great part of her life on the continent, where it was only in my power to visit her once for a few months; and it is only of late, that strict intimacy and affection have taken place which always indeed subsisted, but in a less powerful degree, between us. Length of absence, and difference of years, have however precluded that unreserved confidence, which, except at the open and undisguised period of early youth, is not easily bestowed. Aware of the quick sensibility of Lady Aubrey's feelings, I forbore to probe wounds scarce closed, and carefully avoided every subject likely to recall the past to her mind: till last night, when the emotion in which I found her paved the way for a communication as unexpected as extraordinary. Lady Aubrey confessed that accident had introduced to her knowledge a family, to meet with whom had been her most earnest wish, tho' from a variety of circumstances

ces she had for ever despaired of enjoying that satisfaction; and that altho' a complication of agitating sensations had wholly overpowered her at the first meeting, and rendered her so apprehensive of a second as to delay it till returning health and strength might enable her to support the feelings which she knew it must occasion, the inherent satisfaction resulting from the event she was convinced would be of infinite benefit both to her health and tranquillity in future.

It was not difficult, continued Lady Meredith, to divine who this family must be: and what I have seen of every individual in it, persuades me that Lady Aubrey will not find herself deceived in this flattering expectation.

Mr. Howard had just concluded this interesting narrative, when Lady Meredith entering the parlour, told us that Lady Aubrey requested our company; and that while we attended her Ladyship
she

she should accompany Mr. Howard once more in his rambles thro' the wood, as it was impossible ever to tire in walking over so delightful a spot as Hubert Hill, and she had not yet been shewn all the lions.

My sister and I then went up stairs. We found our dear Lady Aubrey in bed, for she is not allowed to rise till the morning is far advanced; but she looked more beautiful as she sat upright supported by pillows, than any other woman I ever beheld in all the pride of youth, dress, and loveliness.

There is an expression of feeling languor in her charming eyes, that would be alone captivating beyond expression, even divested of the aid they receive from the perfection of her other features, and I am not certain if it would be in my power to admire her so enthusiastically was she relieved from those traces of decay, which betraying the ravages of latent

tent anguish, bespeak in the same moment the warmest admiration and the most compassionate sympathy. In the bloom of eighteen, Miss Marsdon may have been more beautiful, but could not have proved so interesting, so insinuating as Lady Aubrey appears at this instant.

She embraced us both tenderly, and apologized for requesting our company at her bed side; but I cannot deny myself, said she, the gratification of your company from mere motives of cold ceremony, while my heart is under the influence of sentiments so fervent. I am soothed and gratified beyond expression, continued she. My rest last night was more refreshing and tranquil than any I have enjoyed since my accident, which, far from accounting unfortunate, I shall ever regard as the blessing of providence. With a heart overflowing with gratitude to the Almighty, I offered up my humble

ble thanks, and composed myself to sleep with an inward sensation of relief and satisfaction, which cast a gleam of contentment even over my dreams and my repose.

She appeared indeed calm and composed beyond our most sanguine hopes; and tho' a tear of feeling often fell from her eye, and her bosom heaved with an oppression not to be suppressed, a smile of resigned benevolence often broke thro' the sedate melancholy seated on her interesting countenance, and her sighs seemed more the offspring of relief than uneasiness.

Amidst the effusions of that melting and soothing tenderness which linked our hearts together, and which was tacitly acknowledged to have but one common source in my dear father, yet was his name not once pronounced. Amidst the free and mutual communication which a heart-felt interest claimed, tho' to this
every

every circumstance alluded and every enquiry tended, it was a point at which none of us could arrive. It seemed too sacred, too awful to be uttered, and must have led to particulars at which for worlds we would not as yet have ventured to hint.

Lady Aubrey, however, by degrees informed us of all we were most anxious to know: that during the whole period of our residence abroad she had maintained a constant correspondence with Mr. Bensley, unknown to every one, and under promise of profound secrecy. Doubtless the appearance of preserving an intercourse of any kind with the avowed friend of my father, must have seemed an act of impropriety in the eyes of her own family, and might have been deemed romantic by the world; yet could not this amiable, this angelic woman, remain contentedly ignorant of the fate of a man to whom her whole heart had
once

once been given up; however unworthy he had proved himself by overwhelming her with unmerited shame and despair, and by driving her, in the gay season of a youth which fortune and nature had conspired to bless with a thousand envied advantages, to bury herself in solitude and obscurity.

The desire of addressing myself to Mr. Bensley, said Lady Aubrey, had taken possession of my mind for several months previous to my quitting England. From him only could a thousand circumstances reach my knowledge, which it was absolutely essential to my very existence to know, and which to no other person could even be hinted; yet a number of objections, and difficulties almost insurmountable, deterred me from gratifying a wish that every moment grew more irresistible. The awkwardness of an application by letter appeared formidable, and the apprehension of being detected in
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in a step which I well knew my father would deem derogatory to my dignity, and fraught with impropriety, terrified me. This last bar was, alas! but too soon removed by that dear parent's death; and yielding to the potency of my anxiety, I ventured at length to write to Mr. Benfley, and informing him of my residence abroad, where I meant immediately to retire, requested the favor from time to time of hearing from him.

By his answer I was relieved from much misery, and spared the anguish of vague and fruitless conjecture. I was made acquainted with a thousand particulars, minute and interesting: I was satisfied in the point nearest my heart—the point indeed which had dictated my ungovernable and eager desire of information. I was informed of your secluded residence in the south of France, and my fervent and incessant prayers to heaven I found were at length answered:—remorse the
most



most poignant succeeded to errors which——

She stopped for a moment, unable to proceed; but recovering herself—during this correspondence, continued she, which regularly subsisted between Mr. Benfley and myself till within a fortnight of his death, I was minutely informed, according to my most earnest request, of every particular of your manner of life, your solitude, your amusements, and the plan of education that had been adopted. All, all was interesting to me; and this singular participation in your welfare gave an interest to my existence; and while I deplored the bar that for ever excluded all personal knowledge or intercourse between us, my heart strongly cherished and imbibed a warm and maternal affection, which was daily nourished and increased by the perusal of letters from B—— with which the worthy Mr. Benfley, indulgent

gent to my secret wishes though not to my avowed request, often favoured me. These letters, dated from your solitary abode in Languedoc, written with all the enthusiasm of paternal admiration and affection, repeated with unwearied delight the virtues, the talents, and accomplishments of his amiable daughters; and though merely designed for the friendly eye of Mr. Benfley, were faithfully in secret transmitted to me. The returning consolation these epistles indicated thro' the means of his beloved children, to spirits worn out by agonizing repentance and remorse, began at length to afford comfort to mine, and blessing heaven for having touched a heart where virtue though obscured never was eradicated, I in my distant seclusion partook of his revived though dejected tranquillity, and bending with due humility under the just and awful dispensations of Providence, strove with augmented fortitude to submit

mit to evils to which it had pleased heaven to grant some alleviation.

In this way many years rolled on : in compliance with the earnest entreaties of a friend, who partook of my retirement and shared my sorrows, I consented to admit the society of a few chosen acquaintances, and at length began to experience the calm tranquillity, which, where religion possesses a due influence over a mind unburthened with the acute sensations of self reproach, humility and submission always in some measure restore : yet still the source, after heaven, from whence my chief comfort flowed, was the frequent and interesting intelligence which Mr. Benfeley's letters, enclosing others from the quiet retreat at B——, often afforded me ; till in October last, when a packet from my good friend, which had been anxiously expected for an unusual length of time, was put into my hands. The seal announced

nounced fatal news, and my heart with secret apprehensions died within me.

Though the most romantic flight of imagination, continued this amiable woman, sighing with a bitterness that seemed to rend her bosom, never flattered me with the possibility of more than merely knowing he lived, and the most miraculous fluctuation of human events could grant me nothing beyond what I at present enjoyed—the cold satisfaction of perusing letters neither addressed to myself nor intended for my view; though the hand of death could scarce place a bar more unsurmountable between us than that which already subsisted; yet to be told that death itself had divided us, overpowered me with a pang yet unfelt, the violence of which appeared astonishing even to myself.

Between those calamities, however, with which, by the common lot of mortality, we are overwhelmed, and those
which

which a chequered series of dismal and singular events have produced, a material difference must ever be felt. The lenient quality that time so powerfully possesses, in mitigating the asperities of the former, proves wholly ineffectual in those afflictions which disappointed affection or early mortifications have inflicted; and I confess this wound, though in the first moments of sorrow not inferior perhaps to any I had endured, reason and reflection much more speedily allayed; unlike the corroding sting which the memory of my former miseries perpetually renewed, a soothing and not unpleasing regret now rests on my mind, which, while it melts and subdues my heart, does not raise a blush for the unconquerable weakness it confesses.

This affecting conversation, to which tears on my sister's part and mine were the only interruption, and which made the eyes of our dear and amiable Lady

Aubrey

Aubrey overflow with a bitterness that almost wholly exhausted her, terrified me with the apprehension of her sinking wholly under her agitations. I entreated her to defer for the present all further discourse on this subject, and to allow of our leaving her. But to this she would not be persuaded to consent. My sorrows have been of such a nature, said she, that all communication of them is impossible; and confidence, a solace which except with my dear deceased friend Madam de St. Hillaire, I never could enjoy. A painful mixture of shame and pride, encreased perhaps by early prosperity and indulgence, sealed my lips, and confined my sufferings to my own solitary and desolated bosom; how then can my children, my dear children, (repeated she, folding us alternately in her arms) deny me the satisfaction of giving vent to griefs in which their sympathetic hearts must feel a generous concern.

You

You may believe, Sophia, we returned the kind careſſes of this amiable friend with all the enthuſiaſtic warmth which a conduct ſo amiable, ſo truly great, could not fail to excite in circumſtances ſo ſingularly intereſting.

Lady Aubrey then proceeded to inform us, that Mr. Benſeley had minutely acquainted her with all our intended ſchemes, and had with his uſual kindneſs voluntarily promiſed, ſhould his declining health permit of ſuch a journey, to pay her a viſit in the courſe of the following ſummer, attended by his wards; to whom this angelic woman was to have been perſonally introduced as a lady who honored him with ſingular marks of friendſhip and regard, but without the ſlighteſt hint of any ſecret connection.

To this ſoothing ſcheme, ſaid Lady Aubrey, which I had been unceaſingly revolving in my mind how to accompliſh, I returned a moſt grateful and glad
aſſent,

assent, and requested to know at what time you were expected in England. But alas! to this letter I received no answer. I wrote another, and was informed by a relation, who had opened it after Mr. Bensley's decease, that the worthy man was no more. It is not easy to express the anguish and disappointment I experienced on hearing this dismal intelligence. Tho' inured to mortification and regret, I found I had yet much to undergo ere I became callous to their attacks. This blow, by overturning the sole favorite plan on which I had built any remaining hopes of comfort, sunk me to the lowest state of despondency; and the loss of my invaluable friend, Madame de St. Hillaire, put the finishing stroke to my sufferings.

This last calamity pressed hard indeed. In all my other distresses, this beloved friend had been, under heaven, my chief support, and had in some measure sup-

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plied the place of all I had lost. I had still a friend to love, a friend who returned my warm affection. An early separation from my relations in England, had kept me a stranger to all of them, my aunt, Lady Meredith excepted, and she I had known for too short a period to feel for her that attachment which now fills my heart. I was then bereft of my last, my only friend. Ah! can human misery present a more dismal picture to a heart of sensibility, than the melancholy consideration that none exists to animate the feelings of fervent affection.

Still, however, the only form in which alleviation touched my bosom, was the hopes of one day meeting with you; and revolving on the means to procure myself this consolation, in some measure dissipated my gloomy reflections. I knew not where, or to whom to apply for information; and was in this state of melancholy and uncertainty, when the account

count of my Lord Aubrey's illness and request to see me arrived. Painful as was the idea of revisiting England, I hesitated not instantly to comply: and my repugnance was in a great measure subdued, by the hopes of gaining some information relative to you, tho' to chance alone I could owe the intelligence, Little likelihood indeed remained of success. A cruel peculiarity of circumstances deprived me of any light to guide my researches, and an open and avowed pursuit was precluded me. Yet the possibility soothed and supported my spirits; and it was not till I had been some weeks in London, that I found how totally impracticable it was to discover a private family whose names must ever be carefully guarded from my ears. My own maid, who had been with me from my early youth, I ventured to entrust with the enquiry, and two different channels of information occurred; by means of La-

dy Linrose's servants, with one of whom she was acquainted; and if this failed, Mr. Benfeley's relation might be applied to; but that gentleman I found was lately gone to Holland; and when I addressed myself by letter to him on the subject, he assured me in answer that the ladies names were as wholly unknown to him as was their abode; and Lady Linrose's maid also informed mine that she did not believe two such relations were expected by the family, nor had she learnt that any account of them had been received.

Worn out by successive disappointments, I could only conjecture that you were still in Languedoc; and unwillingly constrained to relinquish this pursuit, I prepared myself for taking possession of my country residence according to the dying request of Lord Aubrey, where I was anxious to find myself calmly settled. Fatigued with the civilities and attentions paid me by a numerous class of distant relations

relations and family acquaintance, who crowded on me immediately on my arrival, I determined to set out for Aubrey Castle even at that unpropitious season of the year, in defiance of sundry remonstrances from my friends, and contrary to the wishes of my kind aunt, who promised to follow when the spring was further advanced. How shall I ever bless this resolution, concluded Lady Aubrey, how fervently shall my grateful prayers ascend to the Almighty, for having inspired a measure from which I have derived such unspeakable comfort.

Shall not we too bless heaven, cried I, every hour of our lives, for the fortunate and providential rencontre. Ah! had we known, while we remained in that inhospitable city disowned and unfriended—had we but suspected that it contained one kind, invaluable friend, who could have participated in our difficulties, soothed our disappointments, and

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aided us with comfort and advice, what an altered aspect must it not have worn. Lady Aubrey's kind interest would have compensated for every mortification, her friendship would have supported us under every reverse, and blest in her society, the cruelty of our relations would have lost the severe pang it inflicted.

MAY 1.

Lady Aubrey finds herself now so much recovered, that the physicians declare their attendance no longer necessary, and she is now left to Mr. Rudder's care, who generally visits her twice a day.

I have insisted on attending her constantly; and instead of ceremoniously refusing my assistance, she receives it with undisguised pleasure, and regards my solicitude and anxiety with a warmth of gratitude which would a thousand times repay

repay my fatigues, were they even as severe as she perpetually imagines them to be; but the permission of being constantly with her, is a privilege and indulgence which I would not for the world relinquish. She is still very weak; and I am so peremptory in the duties of my office as nurse, that I will not allow of her conversing on subjects which I know must agitate and affect her. This morning, however, she entreated me to acquaint her where and in what manner we had lived since our arrival in England, and I gave her a brief account of our situation. This I could not possibly contrive to do, without touching on our disappointment in regard to Lord Belmont: but I passed over it as slightly as was in my power. She sighed bitterly however at my relation: alas! said she, how differently *men* feel: even in his place I should have taken you with delight to my bosom.

In talking of pecuniary matters, I mentioned my obligations to Mr. Roatsley. Yet, Sophia, dearly as I love and respect Lady Aubrey, I could not confess more. Shame tied my tongue, and my cheeks even glowed on repeating his name. I have heard a great character of that young man abroad, said she. He spent some weeks at Lisle, where he was much carested and admired; but as I never quitted my home, and never enlarged the private circle who sometimes favored me with their visits, I was spared all chance of meeting with him.

Adieu.

H. SEYMOUR.

LETTER XVI.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

MAY 13.

LADY Meredith left us some days ago. Her old man at home, she said, would be impatient for her return, and she was sensible to what admirable hands she entrusted the care of her dear niece's health. The interval since I last wrote, has indeed produced a change so favorable in Lady Aubrey's health, that she is able to join us in the parlour; and finds herself so well, that she talks of leaving Hubert Hill in a few days. This resolution we have all combated with all the arguments and entreaties possible; but

she tells us seriously that she really longs to find herself tranquilly established in her new residence ; and we have at length, tho' with great unwillingness, given up our importunities.

You may believe I readily and joyfully consented to her earnest request of accompanying her to Aubrey Castle, where Mr. and Mrs. Howard are to follow when some little business which at present detains the former here is concluded.

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MAY 20.

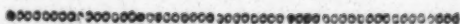
I am still at Hubert Hill. Our beloved Lady Aubrey set off this morning by herself. This change in our plans is occasioned by an indisposition which has seized my sister, and which, without being in the least alarming, renders her low spirited and oppressed. I should have been uneasy at leaving her in her present situation ;



situation; and Lady Aubrey, had I inclined, would not have desired it. She has contented herself therefore with exacting Mr. Howard's promise to carry us both to her in a short time, when his business is finished and my sister's health re-established.

Short as is to be this interval of absence, we did not separate without tears. How gracious, Sophia, have been the dispensations of Providence towards us: when we have imagined ourselves deserted by the whole world, Mr. Howard excepted, and felt ourselves outcasts from our family, with what augmented relish must we not enjoy the soothing idea of possessing a tender and invaluable friend, who gratifies our hearts every moment with new proofs of attachment, and to whom our tenderness and regard are equally essential. What a new source of happiness has this unexpected connexion produced.

Mr. How-



JUNE 3.

Mr. Howard, who is ever anxious to afford us such amusements as the uniformity of our tranquil stile of life admits, asked me on Tuesday morning if I chose to accompany him in an excursion on horseback towards a part of the country that was entirely new to me, and beautifully romantic. I gladly consented; but just as we were equipt for our little excursion, his attorney from town arrived on business, and perceiving how inconvenient his leaving home must prove, I insisted on prosecuting my expedition without him; and merely taking old James the gardener, who has past his days in the county, as my escort.

Fanny was lazy, and would not be persuaded to stir from her work; so I set off about eleven, the morning being delicious

cious for the season, eager to explore some particular picturesque scenes which Mr. Howard had described as admirable subjects for my pencil.

The country around was so singularly beautiful, that I was tempted to go on further than I at first intended; for as we are regular people at Hubert Hill, and keep early hours, I wished to be home by two o'clock; but the sight of a very fine country feat at no great distance induced me to prolong my ride, from the desire of admiring it on a nearer view.

I had just turned the wall of a park that surrounded a house of a very noble appearance, which James, to whom I applied for information, acquainted me was called Holtenham Abbey, when a party of gentlemen and ladies issuing from a gate, with the intention of crossing the road, made my mare plunge, and unable to recover my seat, I was  
thrown:

thrown from it with such violence that screams resounded from every voice.

Happily I did not suffer from any intanglement with the stirrup or accoutrements, and felt at the moment no other bad consequences from the fall, than the painful one of confusion at having so many people to witness this awkward accident, added to that dismay which the sudden shock unavoidably occasioned me.

I believe half a dozen gentlemen at least flew instantly to my assistance, to raise me from the ground, where, confounded and without motion, I lay for some moments. Good heavens, Madam, exclaimed they all, one after another, how do you find yourself? I hope you are not hurt? Where have you suffered? and the rest of the company, who seemed dispersed in walking parties of two or three together, just then coming up, I felt myself nearly as severely stunned by the successive repetitions of the same enquiries,

quiries, to which at first I was unable to make any reply, as I was by the fall itself. Smelling bottles were presented me from all quarters; yet some little time elapsed before I could even recollect myself sufficiently to express my thanks for the kindness and humanity of their solicitude.

An elderly lady, who appeared particularly concerned for me, and who seemed to be owner of the noble mansion, insisted, the moment I was a little recovered, on having me conveyed into the house, from which an avenue of no great length only divided us; and asked me, with much civility and tenderness, if I found it impossible with assistance to walk towards it.

Happy to escape from the company, and embarrassed by the curiosity and notice I excited, I thankfully accepted this obliging offer, and made a feeble attempt to move forward.

Pray



Pray allow me the honor of conducting you, said a young man, who had obliged me to lean on his arm, but whose face from perturbation I had not yet distinguished: the voice, however, was familiar to my ears, and on regarding him I recollected my assistant to be Captain Bradshaw, the friend of Roatsley, against whom, notwithstanding that circumstance, I had conceived no small degree of prejudice, from causes which you will I am certain recollect.

At the instant I cast my eyes on him, Miss Seymour, I believe, said he, and bowed with a diffidence that testified he had not forgotten the self-introduction to which he owed the acquaintance.

The old lady then led the way; and I slowly followed, supported by Mr. Bradshaw, without whose assistance I now found I should have been unable to have stirred, from a severe sprain in my foot. Indeed so painful did it feel, that had not  
my

my anxiety to escape from observation supplied me with fortitude to endure the uneasiness that walking occasioned, I should have concluded moving impossible.

Most of the ladies seemed inclined to accompany us, tho' I very earnestly entreated that I might not be the means of interrupting their walk. My worthy patroness however perceiving their intended civility considerably encreased my perplexity, immediately said, pray ladies and gentlemen don't let this accident interfere with your rambles: since it has not, thank heaven, turned out very unhappily, Mr. Bradshaw and I shall attend the young lady; and saying this, she made a motion with her hand, which obliged the whole party, tho' with seeming reluctance, to leave us; for so powerfully does curiosity and the love of novelty prevail in most dispositions, that perceiving I was not a severe sufferer from the accident,  
the

the company appeared to regard it as a little adventure, the conclusion of which they should not have been sorry to have witnessed.

When we reached the house, at which I did not arrive without considerable difficulty, the door was opened by a footman, who ushered us into a superb parlour, where a young lady apparently of about seventeen, who might have sat for the picture of Hebe, was placed by the fire with a book in her hand.

She seemed to have been confined by some slight ailment, having a large cap and hood tied carelessly under her chin.

I have brought you an unfortunate invalid, Miss Lucy, cried my conductress, and explained my accident in a few words, while Mr. Bradshaw flew to procure me a glass of cold water.

Good God, Madam, what a shocking accident! cried the young lady with much kindness. How dreadfully pale you

you look: pray where are you hurt? I hope not severely? and no sooner had I acknowledged that I suspected my foot had been slightly dislocated, than she insisted on supporting me into her dressing room; where, while the lady of the house dispatched a servant for a neighbouring surgeon, this amiable stranger assisted her maid in chafing my foot with Goulard and water to allay the swelling, which had encreased rapidly from the effort of walking.

Lady Mary, for so I found this hospitable old lady was called, ordered wine and cordials of all kinds to be instantly brought, which she insisted on administering to me with a benevolence that displayed her character in a point of view so humane as to give me the most favourable opinion of her heart. Her young friend was if possible still more kind and equally anxious to provide every thing for my ease and comfort. My foot however



however grew more uneasy, and soon became so swelled as to be perfectly stiff and extremely painful.

Finding myself worse, I was apprehensive of being laid up with this stranger family, which spite of their civility and goodness might have proved as inconvenient for them as disagreeable to myself: I made therefore as light of the accident as I possibly could; assured the ladies it was quite trifling, and insisted on remounting my mare and returning home; promising to walk her gently, and pleading the terror my sister must endure at my unaccountable length of absence.

The surgeon made his appearance just as I spoke, and joined the ladies in regarding this proposal as absolute frenzy. There is no treating casualties of such a nature in this manner, Madam, said he, with much pomposity, and though it is to be hoped that ten days confinement, with proper care, may effect a cure, as  
many



in many weeks, if you are imprudent, may not set you again on foot.

If I was your father or mother, my dear Madam, cried Lady Mary, or any relation who possessed authority or influence over you, I should not only now, but *for ever* prohibit your again venturing on the back of that fiery, dangerous animal. I can no way reconcile myself, added she, to the present prevailing mode of ladies becoming professed jockies; an unaccountable passion for the masculine accomplishment of horsemanship seems now a days to have extended even to our sex, and it must certainly be acknowledged the least graceful and most absurd custom that fashion ever introduced among females. I am sure it persuades many a timid girl to brave dangers from which, under any other form, she would shrink with terror: but the *ton* is not only a sufficient apology for such enterprizes, but a support likewise. Excuse the freedom

dom of my observation, dear Madam, continued she with a good humoured smile, and pray give me leave to send to inform your friends that you are safe and in good hands.

I returned a thousand thanks to Lady Mary for her benevolent civilities; but entreated she would not insist on my stay as I acknowledged myself extremely anxious to get home, and assured her there was not the slightest probable danger in my returning on horseback, as my mare was remarkably safe, and my fall had merely resulted from the sudden appearance of some of the company, which had startled her.

As to your going on horseback, cried she, pray talk of it no more, for indeed you must not think of such imprudence. However, since you are so very eager to leave us, I really wish it was in my power to contrive your removal in the way that would the least subject you to  
inconvenience

inconvenience and uneasiness; but unfortunately I have at present no carriage to offer you; my niece's chariot requiring some alterations, was left behind us in town, so that for some weeks we shall have no equipage but my coach; which a lady, who is just now my guest, got this morning to pay a visit in the neighbourhood, and I am really uncertain whether or not she will be home till the evening. Pray, my dear, turning to her young friend, is there any hopes, think you, that Lady Linrose will behave better than her promise, and return to us before dinner.

Conceive my regret and astonishment, Sophia, at the sound of a name I so little expected to hear, and imagine to yourself my concern upon finding there was so much probability of my meeting with her Ladyship, which her return every instant might subject me to; a mortification which of all things on earth I most wished

wished to avoid. I was thunderstruck on perceiving myself plunged into a situation so awkward, and changed colour so rapidly, that had not the ladies been happily otherwise engaged, they must have remarked my emotion.

I am indeed afraid, Madam, replied Miss Lucy, that my mother's return will hardly leave time sufficient for the young lady's removal this evening; for you know Mrs. Pelcourt and she are old friends; they must always have a long chat when they meet, and I make no doubt that if she insists on it, my mother will pass the day with her.

*Her mother.* Here was a fresh surprise, which wholly disconcerted me. To find myself all at once involved in difficulties so singular and unlooked for, surrounded by relations who had behaved so unworthily by me, and who must feel themselves, when they made the discovery, so ashamed, so vexed at the rencontre,



contre, threw me into a confusion and perplexity not to be expressed; and the idea that it was not impossible but Roatsley himself might be of the party, put the finishing stroke to my embarrassment.

You will ask, I know, Sophia, why I, who was on this occasion the suffering person, who had done no injury to Lady Linrose, and who had no cause to blush for my conduct towards her or her family, should undergo such apprehensions at the thoughts of seeing her:—apprehensions that ought only to have attended the consciousness of misconduct. I own there might have been more spirit perhaps in braving than in yielding to my present feelings; but the certainty of plunging a whole family into confusion was by no means either soothing to my pride or gratifying to my resentment. I felt myself an unwelcome intruder, who was about to create disturbance and uneasiness, and I sunk under the dread of the scene that awaited me.

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K

Come,



Come, dear Madam, cried Lady Mary, finding I was silent, this day at least you must be contented to remain my guest : to-morrow, if you continue thus impatient, my carriage shall attend your commands ; but in the mean time pray allow me to ask whither the message shall be directed with the assurances of your safety ?

You are all goodness, Madam, said I at length, and I am truly ashamed of appearing thus obstinate and ungrateful ; but indeed business of real moment, business of the last importance, renders my absence from home so particularly unfortunate, that my stay is impossible.

I spoke with an energy that I believe surprised them, and must have surmounted all opposition had my removal been practicable.

Since the lady is so eager to be gone, said the surgeon, I think she might be conveyed with tolerable safety in a coach, where

where her leg might be extended at ease on the opposite seat ; but as for any other mode of travelling, particularly on horseback, that, Madam, addressing himself to me with much importance, you would find not merely inconvenient but painful in the extreme, and really when patients refuse to be directed by their medical attendants, they undoubtedly cannot become responsible for the consequences of imprudence.

The awkwardness of my situation giving defiance to all alarm, I was beyond measure provoked with the pedantic parade of this man, who made my determination to depart appear still more stubborn and unaccountable : but the moment he left the room, I enquired, tho' with many expressions of gratitude and obligation, if a carriage could not be procured from the neighbouring village.

It is a poor little place, answered Lady Mary, and boasts of no conveyance be-

yond a cart. I believe a hired chaise might indeed be had from N——; but 'tis twelve miles distant, and it must be so late before it could arrive, that I should imagine a few hours could make little difference. 'Tis already almost two; and before a servant could go and return, the night must be far advanced: at all events to-morrow you shall have my coach; and tho' I ought to ask pardon for importuning you so much, I must confess that I secretly suspect this business of importance to be nothing more than a pretext under which you wish to relieve the fears of your family in person. Now, my dear Madam, be assured I shall be most happy to be favoured with the company of any of your friends who on this occasion may chuse to visit you, and as a message to that effect can be instantly dispatched by your own servant, some of your family will join you in a few hours.

This is a plan, cried Miss Lucy with  
the

the utmost kindness, which cannot fail to render you perfectly at ease ; so do pray, dear Madam, be prevailed with at least to continue with us till to-morrow.

My situation became now more distressing than ever. I at last determined on dispatching James in all haste to Hubert Hill, with orders instantly to return with Mr. Howard's one horse chair, and this plan I flattered myself would save me the mortification of the impending meeting, as in all likelihood it would arrive before Lady Linrose returned from her visit.

Yet a thousand different reasons rendered this scheme, tho' the best I could devise at the time, defective and uncomfortable. Lady Linrose I might by this means avoid ; but her son might still be of the party ; he, and the rest of the family, I might still encounter ; and the late pecuniary transactions that had taken place since we last met, the indigent light in which I had been represented to

K. 3

him,



him, and the pride and incivility of his behaviour on the discovery he had so recently made, all conspired to make me wish myself in any quarter of the globe at that instant rather than under the same roof with him. A confusion of painful and even opposite sensations agitated and perplexed me, while I felt proud, piqued, and displeased. I was sunk, humbled, and dejected, and tears, owing their source less to mortification than sensibility, threatened every moment to burst from my eyes.

This plan, however, I now discovered with bitter dismay, was impracticable, for the day had suddenly changed its aspect, and it rained with great violence; and tho' I would with pleasure have defied any inconveniency, I knew not how to insist further on departing without incurring the imputation of being self-willed and capricious. The weather equally prohibited every mode of travelling, excepting



cepting that which was not to be procured; therefore all resistance was at an end; and it only remained that I should endeavour to comply with a good grace to this cruel necessity. My countenance, I am afraid, betrayed my feelings; for my two amiable companions joined in intreating me to make myself easy, and besought me to lose no time in dispatching my servant home with Lady Mary's kind message to my friends.

Just as they spoke, two ladies entered the dressing room. May I use the freedom to enquire for the young lady, said one of them, (whom I recollected to have been particularly obliging and attentive to me at the moment of my accident,) I was sorry to learn below that it had been found necessary to call a surgeon.

His attendance Madam, answered I, was wholly unnecessary, as a slight sprain is all the inconvenience my fall has occasioned; and I am sure I ought not to re-

gret an accident to which I owe so much kindness and civility.

Indeed I am extremely sorry you have been so unfortunate, returned she; tho' we have profited so much from the event, that if it is only the means of confining you with us for some little time, we shall find difficulty enough in regretting it.

I endeavoured to return an answer expressive of my satisfaction on having encountered a family whose humanity did so much honor to their characters; but my mind was uneasy, and I fear my looks contradicted my words.

Yes, cried Lady Mary, interrupting me, yet you were so extremely unwilling to trust yourself, tho' but for a single night, with this same hospitable family, that do you know, niece, our invalid insisted on returning upon the identical horse that gave us all this alarm, in spite of the surgeon's denunciation against so imprudent a scheme.

Good

Good heavens ! dear Madam, what an idea ! But I hope you have entirely given up all thoughts of such a plan.

Before I proceed, however, in my account of this formidable day, I must interrupt the present conversation by giving you a description of this lady, whose manners and conversation appear so affable and engaging. I told you there were two who entered together ; but the friend who accompanied this engaging young lady, and on whose arm she hung, was remarkable for nothing but an air of hypocritical obsequiousness, which instantly informed me she resided in the family in the comfortable capacity of an humble friend.

The young lady herself appeared about twenty. Her extreme height, which rendered her figure at first sight remarkable, had not imbibed the slightest degree of that awkwardness which often in very tall people precludes grace ; on the con-

trary, her form was uncommonly elegant, and her features, tho' not so regular on examination as a first glance lead me to conclude, being embellished by a very beautiful complexion, and her shape improved by an easy air, fully entitled her to the encomium of being what is generally esteemed *a prodigious fine woman*. You will presently discover, Sophia, why my pen is so minute in it's descriptions.

I was much embarrassed how to make an adequate return to so much civility, and yet retain in my own option the power of departing should an opportunity offer.

I hope you will believe Ladies, said I at length, that on any other occasion I should have been beyond measure gratified with an opportunity of cultivating an acquaintance, which even by anticipation gives me the most sincere pleasure; but this day my leaving home is so singularly inconvenient, that I must confess I  
shall



shall not be quite at ease till I find myself there; and if the evening improves, I hope you will neither conclude me ungrateful nor obstinate, if I still persist in my first intentions. Hubert Hill is not, by my servant's account, above seven or eight miles distant, and I mean to send him off directly with orders to return with Mr. Howard's little carriage, which if the afternoon proves tolerable, is a very easy conveyance.

Oh no doubt he will send his coach for you, cried the young lady. But are you quite determined to leave us?

Mr. Howard? said Lady Mary. I have the pleasure of knowing him well, and an excellent man he is. I was indeed told that he had lately entered into the married state, but I did not know how fortunate he had been.

Perceiving her mistake, I presently undeceived her by saying that my sister was equally so in her union with a man of his singular worth.

I make



I make no doubt of it, returned she: Mr. Howard is a character of uncommon merit, whose connexion must confer happiness on any family with whom he is allied. I had at all events intended myself the honor of waiting upon him and his new married lady, but I shall now have an additional motive.

Both Mr. Howard and my sister, I told her, would be much flattered with the intended favor; and added, that my brother's one horse chair would prove a safe and comfortable conveyance for my return, as in spite of my apparent courage I felt no inclination to venture on horseback, since a more agreeable method of getting home could be adopted.

It was wonderful to observe the sudden change which this last speech effected upon the manners of the young lady whose affability had hitherto appeared so engaging. An expression of surprize, which her countenance betrayed, might have

have passed unnoticed, as also the observation of her companion, who had not as yet articulated one syllable, but had remained in respectful silence till a faint smile from her young patroness induced her to say, truly it may prove a very safe, but surely it can't prove a very *comfortable* conveyance in such an evening as this promises to be.

The alteration which took place in the behaviour of the other, soon after convinced me I had considerably abated of my importance in her eyes, from being known. She immediately walked towards the window; her friend followed, and they whispered together some minutes, while the bell summoned Miss Lucy's maid to dispatch James to Herbert Hill.

So tis only the people at the little white house on the hill, said the young lady in a low voice which I could distinctly overhear while the message was transacting;  
her

her friend replied with so much caution that I could only distinguish the words, quite private sort of people, I assure your Ladyship.

Lady Mary looked towards them as if uneasy at their behaviour, and addressing herself to her niece, endeavoured to engage her in general conversation: but evidently undeceived as to the fancied importance of the visitor, her looks of civility and expressions of kindness were converted into silent indifference and haughty unconcern; and as if her curiosity had been now thoroughly satisfied, she soon after left the room.

Well, Miss Seymour, cried Lady Mary, whether you leave us or not, pray, while we have the pleasure of your company, don't let us deprive the rest of my guests of partaking of it. I hope you are able to walk into the next room.

The amiable Miss Dudley then insisting that I should take the assistance of  
her

her arm, I made shift, tho' with no small degree of pain, to walk into the drawing room, which was luckily on the same floor.

When we entered, we found several gentlemen and ladies differently employed: the young lady before mentioned was placed at the harpsichord, surrounded by most of the former, whom she seemed enchanting by the divine power of music. Our appearance interrupted her for a moment; but after slightly bowing, she continued her concerto.

The gentlemen all advanced, and made their enquiries after me with great politeness. I cast my eyes over them with an anxious look, and a sensation of something not unlike disappointment, on perceiving that Roatsley was not of the party, discovered to me that I should not have been quite so sorry to have beheld him as I had imagined.

Captain Bradshaw, the only person in  
company



company whom till that morning I had ever set eyes on, appeared to regard himself as an acquaintance, and paid me particular attention. Ah, Sophia! how do trifles, as I have more than once observed, often influence us. This young man, against whom I had cherished no small degree of dislike, now no longer appeared what I used formerly to consider him. Nothing had occurred to alter my prejudice; yet it was already gone. I could regard him only as the friend of Roatsley; as his friend, I was convinced he must have merit; and the attentions of that friend could not but prove agreeable to me.

The certainty too of making him abjure his injurious opinion of me, gratified my pride, and the idea, supposing Roatsley was not at Holtenham, that on their next meeting Captain Bradshaw might chance to mention me to him, gave life to my conversation, even while my



my spirits were every moment sinking under the apprehension of the return of Lady Linrose.

I could not help feeling confounded, when Miss Lucy Dudley, taking her reference from Mr. Bradshaw, called me occasionally *Miss Seymour*. The name, it is true, could lead to nothing, yet the certainty that she must have heard of me under that appellation confused me.

Oh! with what pleasure did I contemplate the countenance of the only female relation, my sister excepted, whom I ever recollect to have seen, and how did I trace all the amiable qualities in its expression which Miss Parsons's letter lead me to expect. Miss Jenny kindly tells me, that a family likeness between her features and mine augmented the partiality she was inclined to feel for her. Ah! Sophia! do you imagine that a strong and remarkable resemblance to her brother diminished the affection I was disposed

posed to retain for her, from the moment she was introduced to me.

The instant I was presented to her, I thought I remembered having seen her before; but it was not immediately that I recollected her to be the young lady who once occasioned me a pang, (I am sorry to confess it,) not unlike jealousy on perceiving her seated next her brother at the Opera, the evident object of his peculiar regard. There is the strongest similarity in the tones of their voices, which are both uncommonly pleasing, and something even in their turn of expression so much alike, that the sweet Lucy recalled her brother every instant to my mind. Indeed, independent of this prepossession, her countenance and manners convey an idea of such infinite sweetness and sensibility, that I think at all times I must have been partial to her.

She had placed herself on the sofa by me; but in spite of her evident wish to lessen

lessen the awkwardness of my situation, surrounded by a large company to whom but two hours before I had been accidentally introduced, and not one of whose names, (Captain Bradshaw's excepted,) I even knew, you may believe the conversation was not kept up without visible difficulty.

At this time the young lady, before so particularly described, sat at her harpsichord rattling over some little cotillion tunes, and occasionally interrupting herself to laugh and chat with several gentlemen who leant over her chair. Indeed I soon perceived the music was only a pretence to render the conversation, of which the poor stranger was evidently the topic, less remarked. She often looked at me herself, and carried the eyes of the gentlemen to examine me, while she continued her discourse in a half whisper, which the jumbling of the keys prevented my overhearing.

She

She appeared in great spirits; but an affectation too visible in every motion destroyed at least to me the natural grace of her appearance. I began to suspect she might be Miss Dudley; which idea prevented me from gratifying my curiosity by means of her sister, and I employed myself ineffectually in trying to discover a resemblance in her features either to those of Miss Lucy or her brother.

At length, however, on that young lady's being called to the end of the room to examine some music, I enquired of Captain Bradshaw the name of the lady at the harpsichord; adding, I was so singularly situated as to be a stranger to the whole company.

Is it possible you should be ignorant of it, said he in a tone of surprize. It is the celebrated and admired Lady Elizabeth Sedley, whom I am certain you must at least have heard of often.

Sophia,



Sophia, conceive, if you can, my feelings at this information. Ah ! no ! it is impossible : for except in a similar situation, they are not to be conceived. My heart beat violently, even while a sudden faintness came over me, and I fear my agitation must have been too apparent, for Miss Lucy just then returning to her seat, said with much sweetness—I am afraid, Miss Seymour, your foot is more uneasy than you will own, for you look extremely pale ; and Mr. Bradshaw fixed his eyes on me with a look of investigation that soon changed my complexion from the palid to a deeper dye.

The gentlemen now approaching the sofa, the harpsichord seemed deserted ; and so I imagine thought Lady Elizabeth, for advancing towards us, she called out in a tone of careless familiarity, I am afraid, Miss Seymour, this will be a miserable afternoon for your excursion in the one horse chair, for it rains extremely hard.



The voice in which she pronounced these words let me into a secret that I had before half suspected, viz. that the meanness of my equipage had so much lowered me in her Ladyship's estimation, as to produce the change in her manner for which I had not been able to assign any other motive.

I know not whether Miss Dudley felt the indelicacy of her behaviour, but she immediately said, it is indeed extremely unfortunate, since Miss Seymour is so anxious to go, that Mamma should have occupied Lady Mary's coach to-day; for these little carriages, tho' mighty pleasant in fine weather, are not well adapted for rain.

Oh in such an evening the thing is impossible, cried all the gentlemen at once. Miss Seymour cannot surely think of it.

It rained indeed harder than ever; and I was truly provoked by a change of weather so teizing and unlucky. My  
foot

foot was painful, my mind uneasy, I required rest for both, and here I was not likely to enjoy ease in any form.

A carriage was soon after heard driving up to the door, and my heart panted with expectation. I was convinced it was Mr. Roatsley, and no longer harboured a doubt when I heard Mr. Bradshaw call out, I dare say it is Roatsley, and instantly went out to meet him.

My perturbation, however, was not of long continuance; for this speech convinced me that tho' he might be expected he made not one of the family; and presently after Mr. Bradshaw returned, accompanied by Sir Edward Sudbury.

He met with a very gracious reception from the whole company, particularly from Lady Elizabeth, who seemed much pleased by his entrance. As he did not immediately recognize me amongst so large a company, I began to imagine that perhaps he designed to conduct himself  
with

with a prudent reserve; and recollecting his advances in town, which had been interrupted by my departure, now absence had probably cooled his flame, he might incline to keep at a distance and withdraw his notice by degrees.

I soon found, however, how unjust was this surmise, when Sir Edward, discovering me, approached with his usual modesty and politeness, a glow of satisfaction being visible on his countenance.

He enquired with anxiety after my health, then for my sister and Mr. Howard, and regretted in strong terms my unexpected departure from town, which he said had astonished him, as he had no doubt of finding me at Mrs. Hindon's on his return from a short visit he had made in the country about that time.

Dinner was soon after announced; and tho' with pain I walked into the parlour, supported by the arm of the sweet Lucy, who gaily ordered all the gentlemen to depart

depart before us, and resolutely refused all their offers of assisting me.

She kindly placed herself next me at table; and Sir Edward, though Lady Elizabeth in a manner invited him to go to the other side by herself, contrived to seat himself on my other hand. This little mortification by no means softened the hauteur of her behaviour to me; on the contrary, from the moment she remarked Sir Edward's assiduities, her countenance betrayed a scornful displeasure, but ill concealed under the mask of neglect and indifference.

As the evening advanced, I grew more engrossed with the expectation of seeing Lady Linrose; and about eight her Ladyship entered the drawing room, accompanied by her eldest daughter.

I easily recollected the face that had been pointed out to me at the Opera. It's expression, however, was much changed. The former severity of her aspect

had now entirely given place to smiles, good humour, and condescension; and though I could not wholly divest myself of the prejudice of my first prepossession, I had at least the impartiality to condemn myself for it.

I hope you did not wait dinner for me, Lady Mary, cried she, after the first compliments were over, for my good friend was rather indisposed, and so anxious for my stay, that I found it would have been unkind to have refused.

I did not expect your Ladyship, returned Lady Mary, and now that you are returned I ought not to regret your absence, as to that alone I owe the company of another visitor, who has only favoured me with it because my coach was not to be had to carry her home. Pray give me leave, Miss Seymour, added she, to have the pleasure of introducing you to Lady Linrose.

I coloured at the introduction. But  
Lady



Lady Linrose, with much politeness and no change of countenance, said she should be happy to have the honour of knowing me, and hoped her having the carriage had been no very material inconvenience to me.

Miss Dudley, however, to whom I underwent the same ceremony, only half bowing to my curtsy, stared me in the face with evident curiosity, and a look of supercilious ease which wholly disconcerted me.

She is by no means plain ; but a look of conscious superiority renders her features determinedly unpleasing.

My accident, for which Lady Linrose testified much regret and concern, furnished conversation for the first quarter of an hour : but her open and unreserved affability immediately convinced me that no suspicion had arisen in her mind on hearing my name, and her manner was so totally opposite from what I expected

to have found it, that in spite of my long cherished resentment I could not avoid feeling delighted to perceive the mother of Roatsley so much more amiable than I had conceived possible.

Relieved from my alarm of being known, I flattered myself I should soon grow more composed: but ah! Sophia, remained there not yet sufficient to disturb and distress me? Lady Elizabeth! to meet with her, and in a party so gay, where the relations on both sides seemed met to rejoice over the approaching union which was soon to cement their friendship and intimacy by still stronger ties! Oh how sunk, dejected, and dispirited did I feel.

The company were not yet sat down to cards, but continued chatting during a short interval which succeeded to the entrance of Lady Linrose and her daughter, when the door opened, and Mr. Howard, who anxious to relieve Fanny's apprehensions,

apprehensions, had set off in defiance of the inclemency of the evening, was announced.

Lady Mary received him with the kindness and familiarity due to an old friend, (for I find they have been long acquainted), and congratulated him on my safety, which I give you my word, said she, you chiefly owe to me; for so eager was Miss Seymour to return home, that I was obliged to exert the authority which above forty years seniority has given me over her, to prevent her risking her neck upon that horrid horse of your's, which I hope you will dispose of in all haste.

My joy at seeing Mr. Howard, who was equally delighted to find me so slightly hurt, drove Lady Linrose for an instant from my mind. The idea soon recurred, however, when on turning round, I perceived the alteration which his unexpected appearance had produced

on her countenance. A look of gloom, astonishment, and vexation, were there predominant; and a flush of embarrassment tinged her cheeks. The truth seemed at once to have flashed upon her mind. Mr. Howard, she well knew; and my name had been repeated to her so often from his lips, that no doubt could remain. She seemed for a moment confounded and irresolute, but on Lady Mary's presenting Mr. Howard to her, she appeared suddenly to recollect herself and received him as an utter stranger, whom she had never before beheld, with a cold formality not untinctured with hauteur.

He on his part, finding her design was to affect ignorance, bowed with polite distance, and continued to chat with his usual ease to Lady Mary.

From the moment of his appearance, Lady Linrose kept a profound silence. She often glanced upon me an eye of scrutiny

scrutiny as if by stealth, and her looks were by no means expressive of satisfaction: but the instant I seemed to remark her notice, she withdrew it and employed herself very busily at her knitting, which she entangled and disentangled unceasingly with much ingenuity.

Mr. Howard, in spite of the most pressing entreaties, insisted on returning home, though the evening was damp and cold. I would have given the world to have accompanied him; but finding the proposal would be received with great opposition, I prevailed on myself to say nothing, Lady Mary promising herself to accompany me to Hubert Hill in the morning.

After he was gone, the company divided into little parties. Those who preferred cards, sat down to the card table, while most of the young people seemed more inclined to chat.

All the gentlemen, Sir Edward and

L 4

Captain.



Captain Bradshaw excepted, flocked around Lady Elizabeth's chair. They seemed indeed most zealous in their devoirs, and attached themselves wholly to her; listening with delight to every little folly which levity drew from her lips, while she received their homage with a pride she took but little pains to conceal. Oh! my Sophia, from this severe expression, are you not afraid that my unfortunate partiality has given birth to the worst of passions, envy and injustice. Disappointment, by calling forth our powers of exertion, is generally thought to improve the heart; but I fear you will conclude my mortifications have had a very different effect on mine. Believe me, however, my dear, when I solemnly declare that those mean passions are far from having influenced me in my representation of Lady Elizabeth. Had her manners possessed that polished dignity, or her conversation that unassuming good sense,

sense, which from the choice of Mr. Roatsley I could not but expect, be assured I should have admired with unprejudiced eyes the woman of his heart: but oh! how opposite did I conceive that woman to be from what I find her. How pleased, how gratified did she not seem with the flattery and attention of the gentlemen present; who really, as far as one day's acquaintance could enable me to judge, appeared uncommonly insipid in their conversation, and far from engaging in their address. But probably they suffered not a little from the comparison my thoughts were continually drawing between them and another, ah! how infinitely their superior.

Ought I not to regard this marriage as a material fault in Mr. Roatsley's character: for that his chief, if not his only aim in it is fortune, I cannot help being convinced; and is it not an unpardonable error to prize the advantages of splen-

dour so highly, and to hold domestic happiness in so low estimation. Yet I ought not to judge thus harshly. We know not a thousand circumstances which may render this match not only laudable but meritorious; and of Lady Elizabeth I merely form my opinion from the observation of a few hours, where the little defects of address must be supposed wholly to have influenced my judgment. Erroneous as this mode of conclusion may be, yet the manner so generally bespeaks the character, that where the one is informed and intelligent, the other seldom or never appears trifling or disgusting.

But to return to the company. Lady Linrose being engaged at whist, still preserved towards me the cold distance she had assumed since Mr. Howard's appearance, and addressed herself to me no more during the remainder of the evening. Her eldest daughter seemed languid and out of spirits, and at length  
took

took up a book, in which however she only occasionally looked, often recurring to the investigation of my figure, which appeared much the most amusing employment of the two; for she examined me sometimes for minutes together with no great cordiality in her countenance, and with entire disregard to the uneasiness it gave me. Lady Elizabeth was soon persuaded to retire to the next apartment, where she was solicited to play on the organ, which induced almost all the company to follow her. Miss Lucy Dudley, however, seeing me disengaged and silent, kindly resumed her seat on a sofa; where, with Sir Edward and Mr. Bradshaw, we made a sort of distinct cotterie, and began to chat very agreeably together.

Lady Linrose, who appeared to remark with displeasure her daughter's attention to me, soon called her to look over her cards, and kept her by her side  
the

the rest of the evening; and a message from the music room soon after requesting Sir Edward to accompany on the flute Lady Elizabeth's voice in a song, unwillingly obliging him to leave the drawing room, Mr. Bradshaw and I were left in a manner *tete a tete* on the sofa. I found him agreeable and intelligent, attended with a certain bluntness of manner which rather inspired the idea of sincerity than rudeness, and we soon entered into a most interesting conversation.

Pray, said he, may I ask your opinion of Lady Elizabeth. She is universally followed and admired; yet I cannot help suspecting that her splendid fortune and brilliant prospects have contributed full as much to place her so high in the lists of beauty as any intrinsic charms she possesses; but I make no doubt you will not agree in my opinion, for I know on this subject it is impossible you should talk according to conscience.

Why



Why so, said I.

Because it is wholly out of nature for one fine woman to give her genuine sentiments of another.

Do you then imagine envy so universally prevalent.

By no means. I only believe that the terror of such an imputation induces every handsome female to bestow upon another encomiums infinitely beyond her private opinion.

To prove my sincerity, said I, I will acknowledge, that Lady Elizabeth, tho' undoubtedly a fine looking woman, is less so than from report I expected to find her.

Had she trusted to nature, returned he, she might have merited the appellation you give her; but affectation and coquetry will distort the finest features, and produce awkwardness where we ought to admire grace.

That the friend of Mr. Roatsley should  
express

express to a stranger, with so little reserve, an opinion so unfavourable of the woman who was soon to be united to him, surprized me not a little, and I could only account for it by supposing that her coquetish behaviour had provoked him so much as to put him out of all patience and had rendered his prudence off its guard.

I thought, said I, all her little follies of that sort were soon to have a speedy conclusion.

Conclusion, repeated he, in a voice of undisguised displeasure; not so long as youth and good looks remain, I'll be sworn; at least if we may judge of the future by the present.

I thought Lady Elizabeth had been on the verge of matrimony, said I, with as much composure as I could assume, yet trembling to hear it confirmed from authority so indisputable.

And pray can you, Miss Seymour,  
who

who have passed part of the winter in town, pretend to imagine that matrimony, to a vain woman, excludes the attentions of a crowd of followers.

Your reproof of my ignorance is just, said I, (attempting to smile, though inwardly depressed by an answer so unsatisfactory and evasive, and which yet tacitly acknowledged the truth of Lady Elizabeth's engagement) but I was little in company, had few acquaintance, and spent my time chiefly at home in a very sober domestic family.

Yes, we could not conceive where you had hid yourself, for you were to be seen no where. It was at one time concluded that you must have left town.

That was exactly the case, returned I.

Not *exactly*, for I think you did not go till the beginning of March.

I could not avoid being rather surprised, on finding Mr. Bradshaw, with whom I had had when in town not the slightest

slightest intercourse or acquaintance, so well informed of my motions ; and reading my thoughts from a transient expression in my countenance—you are astonished, said he, smiling, to find me so accurate in this point ; but I believe you would be still more so were I to inform you how long I have had the honour of considering myself intimately acquainted with you, though entirely without your knowledge or participation.

I must confess my surprise, cried I, laughing, and also my regret, that I should have been so fortunate without knowing it.

O, in regard to Miss Seymour, I give you my word I am extremely intelligent.

I began faintly to suspect from whence this information had been derived, and to flatter myself that it might have owed its origin to Roatsley's solicitude. This idea produced an anxiety beyond measure potent, to draw some soothing particulars

ticulars from his friend; but as if eager to excite a curiosity he meant not to gratify—perhaps, cried he, you might be no less surprized were you to know that I was in constant pursuit of you all the beginning of the winter; nay, and what is yet more wonderful and perplexing, I do not claim either merit to myself or gratitude from you, for the indefatigable pains and industry I employed in hunting after you at every place of amusement where it was probable you might appear.

It is very wonderful indeed, cried I, secretly delighted, nor could I ever have suspected, stranger as I found myself in this country, that I possessed any friends sufficiently interested in me to be solicitous how or where I passed my time.

O, cried he with an investigating look that seemed to penetrate into what effect his words might produce, nature has been so bountifully profuse to some of her happy favorites, as to endow them  
with



with the gift of creating friends by a *coup d'oeil*—friends, who exist but in their sight, who live but on their smiles, and who watch with unwearied patience and assiduity, every opportunity for a meeting which indulgent fortune may throw in their way : friends, who develope at one glance, and adore almost in an instant, those virtues and excellencies which in common mortals require intimacy, investigation, and length of time, to expand and discover themselves.

Vague as were these expressions, a dawning ray of hope led me to give them an interpretation so conscious, as covered me with blushes. I knew not what reply to make ; and the earnest look with which he evidently tried to develope my thoughts, compleated my embarrassment.

I am quite in the dark, cried I at length, and cannot conceive at what you aim.

So I perceive, said he with a satyrical smile ;

smile; but I intreat that my words may not throw you into any perplexity. I should be miserable, were your rest to-night to be disturbed from a fruitless attempt to unriddle my mysterious oracles.

I believe my rest will not be easily interrupted this night, replied I with a careless air, for my fatigues, or rather my alarm, has exhausted me a good deal, and I feel quite drowsy and stupid.

Perceiving the gravity with which I spoke, Mr. Bradshaw instantly assumed a more reserved behaviour, and shifting the discourse to other topics, I discovered that he had not gone into the country at the time I imagined, from the private conversation I overheard, nor for some weeks after. "I was several times under the apprehension of recruiting orders, said he, but received a longer reprieve than I had dared flatter myself with the hopes of obtaining.

The card party having now concluded  
their

their rubbers, and Lady Elizabeth, with her suite of attendants, being returned into the drawing room, a period was put to our conversation. But it left the strongest impression on my mind, and at supper I could not help secretly wishing that Mr. Bradshaw might be placed next me. In this however I was disappointed; for Sir Edward betrayed an anxiety so eager to procure a seat next mine, that the other with a grave bow gave way to him.

At this little manœuvre Lady Elizabeth appeared by no means pleased. Indeed nothing could be more pointed than the haughtiness of her manner to me the whole evening. A coquet, it would appear, expects the exclusive privilege of enjoying the homage of every man who beholds her; for tho' the rest of the gentlemen, Mr. Bradshaw excepted, attended her with the most zealous assiduity, the mortification she experienced in finding  
this

this devotion was not unanimous, evidently hurt and corroded her. Whether the meanness of my equipage, and the humility of my abode, at the *little white house on the hill*, increased her indignation, I know not, but she regarded me with looks of contempt, and behaved to Sir Edward with so much childish ill humour, that I began at length to suspect some secret partiality must have produced a conduct for which mere selfish vanity seemed an inadequate cause.

This sullen behaviour of Lady Elizabeth, the cold distance of Lady Linrose, and the imperious disregard of her eldest daughter, added to my being conscious how disagreeable my presence, tho' from very different motives, must prove to them all, made me feel beyond measure uncomfortable; and the painful weight which lay heavy at my heart, and wholly depressed my spirits, made Sir Edward's conversation not merely unpleasant but  
irksome

irksome to me; especially as my suspicion of Lady Elizabeth's attachment was strengthened and confirmed every instant by her increasing uneasiness. When I considered however how inferior Sir Edward was in all points to his competitor, it was not possible for me to conceive that caprice, or folly itself, could be blind to the striking difference between them.

The cordial intimacy that subsisted between the two families, and indeed included all present but myself, not only excluded me from all share of the conversation, which I was far from regretting, but made me feel awkward, as well as miserable. Lady Mary indeed often addressed herself to me with peculiar civility; but as I was placed at a distance from her, politeness did not compensate for the rude neglect of her niece.

The conversation happening to turn on resemblances, I think, said Sir Edward, I never beheld a more striking likeness than



than the profiles of Miss Lucy Dudley and Miss Seymour exhibit at this moment. I have been considering them on each side of me for some time, with almost an equal mixture of wonder and admiration.

A likeness! repeated Miss Dudley. I must acknowledge I scarce ever beheld two faces in my opinion more opposite.

I am extremely sorry to differ from you, Madam, returned he; but I still dare appeal to the company if my remark is not just.

Strikingly so indeed, cried Lady Mary; tho' till it was mentioned I own I was not sensible of the resemblance. But in spite of the difference of complexion it is really remarkable. Don't your Ladyship think so, added she, turning to Lady Linrose?

I must confess, returned her Ladyship, with a cold, embarrassed air, I am of  
Caroline's

Caroline's opinion: I cannot perceive the likenesses.

Good heavens! cried Caroline, how should there be any. The eyes of the one are black, and Lucy's are quite blue.

I did not speak of the eyes of the two ladies, but of their profiles, said Sir Edward. There is even somewhat in the expression of countenance so much alike, that had I never before been in company with either, I should have concluded them nearly related.

What effect these words produced in the countenances of Lady Linrose and her daughters, I had not resolution to examine, and conscious confusion made me keep my eyes fixed on the table; from which however I soon raised them in astonishment on hearing Lady Linrose say, you pay my daughter a very unmerited compliment by the comparison, Sir Edward, and really now you put it into my head, I don't know but there is some  
fort

sort of likeness, especially in the under part of the face: and soon after, when we were separating for the night, her Ladyship wished me a good night with particular civility and affability.

Confounded with the various events of the day, the moment I found myself alone in the chamber allotted me, I threw myself into a chair, and gave way to a train of reflections, which so wholly overpowered me, as to banish all desire of sleep. I could not but admire the singularity of that chance, which had conducted me so strangely into the midst of my relations, and to the party which of all others I wished the most to avoid; while I knew that my presence, by overwhelming them with confusion and embarrassment, must prove still more disagreeable to them than to myself. Lady Elizabeth too—to feel all my half-suppressed emotions animated and renewed by this un-

expected and unwished for rencontre, ah! Sophia! don't you pity me?

After passing a very restless night, I found my foot so much worse, that walking even into the next room was almost impracticable. I therefore sent a message to Lady Mary by her maid, who assisted me to dress, intimating that if her Ladyship would give me leave, I should breakfast in my own apartment, where I wished to remain till the carriage was ordered to carry me home. By this means I avoided seeing any of the company, whom I really dreaded encountering at breakfast, after the perturbation of the preceding day. I regretted however, that in escaping from the others, I must be deprived of seeing Mr. Bradshaw, whose mysterious discourse it must be owned astonished though it did not perplex me, and formed no inconsiderable portion of my reflexions during the night.

Lady

Lady Mary entered my chamber soon after, and made a thousand kind enquiries respecting my health. She informed me that Lady Linrose was confined to bed with a headach, and that Mr. Bradshaw had set off for his quarters two hours before breakfast: and after kindly disapproving of my imprudence in venturing home, told me, since I was determined to go, she should herself see me safe to Hubert Hill, as she wished to take the earliest opportunity of waiting on Mrs. Howard.

Miss Lucy Dudley was likewise so obliging as to pay me a visit before I left Holtenham. While she sat with me in my chamber, Lady Mary again entered. I think an airing will be of service to you, my dear, said she to her, after your late confinement. Pray will you accompany me to Mrs. Howard's. Her husband is an old friend of mine, and I possess few or none I respect so highly.

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With



With all my heart, my dear Madam, cried she; and having sent the maid for her hat, we immediately proceeded down stairs, which was to me a very difficult undertaking and one that I did not accomplish without great pain, though I had an assistant on each hand.

When we entered the hall, we were met by Lady Elizabeth and Miss Dudley. The former, with a reluctant bow, hoped I was well: and the other, without even vouchsafing me that civility, hastily called out—Lucy, where are you going?

I mean to accompany Lady Mary and Miss Seymour. The day is fine, and an airing will be agreeable.

I believe Mamma will not allow of your going, sister.

Why so.

Nay, I shall go ask her: and instantly returning, said—Mamma does not chuse  
you

you should risk taking cold by airing to-day Lucy.

Lord how odd, when it is the sweetest weather in the world.

O there is no chance of cold in such a morning, cried Lady Mary. It will do her good I'm convinced.

It is Mamma's commands, said Miss Caroline gravely; and although the sweet Lucy went herself to solicit, she came back disappointed. I am very sorry, said she, taking my hand, that I cannot have the pleasure of your company a little longer; but I hope Lady Mary will visit at Hubert Hill more than once while we remain at Holtenham, and I shall most assuredly be of the party next time.

Lady Linrose, you perceive, adheres with conscientious integrity to her promise of debarring all intercourse between her family and ours. Angry as I am, there is somewhat in her manners so insi-

nuating, that I cannot so cordially blame her conduct as I did before I saw her: nay what is still more strange, I cannot avoid suggesting excuses for her behaviour; and even feel somewhat soothing and consolatory in the idea that Roatsley's mother, whom I desire so much to love and respect, seems more worthy of these sentiments than I ever imagined she could prove. Her son resembles her extremely, though the expression is different.

I believe, Sophia, prejudice and partiality blind the eye of judgment so unaccountably, that people are seldom to be trusted in their prepossessions where a strong and lively interest is at stake. Perhaps we have judged too hardly of this family. To oppose Lord Belmont in a favourite point, may be to relinquish all hopes of his favour for ever; and if such is the inflexibility of his temper Lady Linrose is not so much to blame.

Fanny was much relieved by my return

turn though I looked miserably ill. My foot was painful, and my mind in agitation; and the instant Lady Mary left us, I was put to bed, where however I did not sleep, but enjoyed a more soothing relief in relating to my sister all the circumstances of my disagreeable adventure.

H. SEYMOUR.



LETTER XVII.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

JUNE 6.

AS my sprain still confines me to the sofa, and my journal is always my favourite amusement, I have employed the two last days almost constantly in writing. Indeed I am happy to fly to

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any

any occupation that has the power of dividing my thoughts: for my Sophia will easily conceive the late incident was but ill calculated for destroying that fatal impression, which I flattered myself time and absence, assisted by my most vigorous exertions, would at length subdue. Would to heaven the marriage was once finally concluded. When doubt (absurd as it is to doubt) is converted into certainty, my endeavours I am convinced must be successful. I may suffer at first, but these turbulent feelings will abate. At present a thousand circumstances are ever ready to occur to rouse and animate an attachment alas! too insinuating.

How can I account for Roatsley's conduct, hinted to me by his friend. Oh! my dear, was it indeed Roatsley who occasioned Mr. Bradshaw's researches? why then his silence to Mr. Howard's letter; and why, with engagements so serious on his hands, could he allow in  
himself



himself a solicitude so fruitless? His conduct altogether is inexplicable, and the more I attempt to unravel it, the less my conjectures give me satisfaction.

Are you not astonished, my love, at my representation of Lady Elizabeth Sidley. Is it possible to believe Roatsley can make such a sacrifice to fortune. Oh! Sophia! a sacrifice to principle I am convinced it must be. Duty and persuasion have prevailed with him to acquiesce in a match on which his family have set their hearts.

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JUNE 10.

I have been visited during my confinement by the good parson's family, who spent yesterday with us.

Mrs. Heathcote, though unacquainted but by report with Lady Mary Lawrence, told us a thousand little country anecdotes

M 5

dotes

[dotes of her, which all proved the goodness of her heart and the liberality of her ample purse; for she is possessed of a splendid income, having been left by her late husband the sole disposal of his fortune. This fortune, Mrs. Heathcote said, it was generally supposed would center in her niece, Lady Elizabeth Sedley, who was not much beloved by the ladies in the neighbourhood, as she uniformly behaved to them with a conscious superiority, and imperious reserve, that rendered her company formal and disgusting. Indeed, said she, her Ladyship, I am told, exacts a deference and attention that few are willing to pay; for which reason there is usually a party at Holtenham of people of the first rank and importance from town, with whom alone Lady Elizabeth will associate on a footing of equality.

I ventured to enquire, finding the good woman both intelligent and communicative,

cative, whether or not Lord Linrose possessed any property in this part of the country. She believed not, she told me: but since Mr. Howard had left England, above one half of the estates around had changed their original proprietors; and my Lord Belmont had lately made two different purchases of considerable amount, which had secured to him a decided parliamentary interest in the county. On one of these estates, said she, to which he has given the name of Mount Dudley, and which is not above seven miles distant, he has built a very elegant though not a very large house, and has presented it to his favourite grand son Mr. Roatsley, who however has never lived in it as it has not yet been put in order for a family: but I understand they are fitting it up in all haste, and furnishing it very magnificently for his place of residence so soon as his marriage is concluded: so  
you

you will have them for neighbours presently.

Is that event soon to take place, demanded Fanny.

Indeed, Madam, nobody seems to know. It has been long talked of; and before Mr. Roatsley set out on his travels, every one said it would happen directly on his return. But it has been whispered since his return, that matters are not in such forwardness as was imagined. The young man's ardour is suspected to be cooled; nay some people say it never was extremely violent; but that when he was very young, and the lady hardly fifteen, there subsisted a childish attachment between them, which originated entirely on the side of Lady Elizabeth; and that Lord Belmont, who has been unfortunate in some of his family, particularly in the article of matrimony, and who was not easily reconciled to the present Lord Linrose on his marriage,



marriage, although by the death of a distant relation her Ladyship has brought him a very considerable fortune, exacted a promise, and promoted an engagement between his grandson and this lady, which is intended to be concluded on his Lordship's return from the Continent.

Lady Elizabeth is much to be pitied, in my opinion, cried Fanny, if with all her splendid advantages of birth and fortune they cannot secure the heart of the man she has chosen.

I agree with you perfectly, Madam: But I believe ladies of superior rank and education don't always think in that manner; and by what I hear, Lady Elizabeth is not much calculated for domestic happiness.

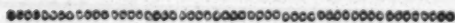
Conscious of my secret anxiety, I forbore, while Mr. Howard and the rest of the company were present, to prolong the subject: but finding myself accidentally alone with Mrs. Heathcote, for a  
quarter



quarter of an hour after dinner, I artfully renewed the topic of Lady Elizabeth; and she then told me she was intimately connected with the gentlewoman who had superintended her education as governess, from whence she had drawn the early part of her information. Mr. Roatsley, said she, has been I know acquainted with the young lady from infancy. She was his sister's friend, and had often been his own playfellow. It is not improbable therefore that her infantine attachment had produced in him a return of affection before he went abroad that might partake more of gratitude than passion. It must be owned Lady Elizabeth has but ill answered the fond expectations of her family; and probably he finds himself disappointed, after several years absence. But there is no trusting to report. It is very certain however that he has not once visited at Holtenham since his arrival; though, owing to Lady Mary's indisposition,

disposition, the family only passed a very few weeks this winter in town. They say Lady Elizabeth is much offended at the coolness of his assiduities, and that there is a very formidable rival, Sir Edward Sudbury, in the way, who is much in favour with her Ladyship at present, but I dare say there is nothing in it.

All this accounts a little, Sophia, for Captain Bradshaw's insinuations.



JUNE 12,

To-day I have ventured to take a short walk, and am considerably better. We have had compliments of enquiry from Lady Mary after my health more than once.

We have been rather uneasy at not hearing from our dear, dear Lady Aubrey all this while; and we now find we have had but too much reason for apprehension:

hension: alas! she has had a relapse; but thank God not an alarming one. She is now, she tells us, in the kindest of letters which we received this morning, quite recovered, and has got Sir William and Lady Meredith with her at the castle. I find myself settled here, says she, much to my satisfaction. The ancient architecture of my abode has neither banished light, nor precluded cheerfulness; and I am determined its grandeur shall on no account be fettered with state or parade. My mind begins to partake of the tranquility around me; and I am enabled myself to taste that comfort which an overgrown and otherwise useless fortune allows me the privilege of dispensing to others. But when shall my rising satisfaction receive its full completion in the dear society of my beloved children? when shall I again fold them to my heart, and receive, in tears of heartfelt pleasure, a compensation for those

those of bitterness and misery which have flowed with such profusion from my eyes? I will not however soften your feeling hearts into a hasty compliance with my wishes, which may not prove, just at this time, wholly convenient to the worthy Mr. Howard. I will trust to your affection to expedite your visit as soon as you can, and till I enjoy the happiness of seeing you, do not fear that I am either solitary or desponding; no, on the contrary, be assured I am grateful, contented, and happy. I have at present the pleasure of Sir William and my dear aunt's company, who will not leave me for some time. My doors are never shut against those in my neighbourhood who favour me with their visits, without exacting a scrupulous return; and my mind is at ease while I rest assured of the love and attachment of those dear and amiable children who are so entirely possessed of mine.

Dear

Dear and ever valued Lady Aubrey!  
With what delight shall we fulfil our  
promise. Mr. Howard's business will  
detain him a fortnight longer: but I  
have written that if any more delays in-  
tervene, and my sister continues well, I  
shall undoubtedly make the journey by  
myself.

H. SEYMOUR.

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LETTER XVIII.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

JUNE 15.

**I** WILL not anticipate, Sophia. But  
why is fortune so industrious in throwing  
accidents in my way which prove the ut-  
most exertion of my resolution.

Yesterday



Yesterday Miss Patty Heathcote walked up in the morning, to inform us that a set of strolling players had lately arrived in the little village near us; that they had fitted up their theatre in a barn, where for some preceding evenings they had performed some of the best plays, much to the satisfaction, said she innocently, of *very excellent judges*; and that as neither she nor her mother had ever seen a play, they would take it as a *prodigious favour indeed* if Mr. and Mrs. Howard and I would do them the honour to go and make a party with them.

The little girl's eyes, while she delivered this message, sparkled with an eagerness which persuaded Mr. Howard at once to agree to the measure, and made me really anxious for its success; and Fanny, who with the sedate character of a sober married woman preserves all the innocent eagerness of seventeen, is always

ways so much delighted with any frolic, that she was desirous of going the instant it was proposed.

As the village is scarce a mile and an half distant, and it was bright moon light, it was agreed that the whole party should walk to and from the theatre, concluding that the performance would not detain us very late ; myself excepted, whom Mr. Howard insisted on carrying thither in his little equipage, as walking, after my late accident, might prove hurtful, my foot, though almost well, being still weak. Miss Patty ran full speed down the hill, breathless with expectation to equip herself for the play-house, and to request that her father and mother and all the children old enough to accompany them, would assemble at Hubert Hill to dinner, from whence we should all set off together.

The labours of the toilet are little known in the rural world ; and Nature  
has

has so lavishly decked this happy innocent family with rosy cheeks, sparkling eyes, and smiling countenances, that they are as unnecessary as unknown. An hour after, we beheld the good parson and his wife ascending the hill, followed by five of their children; and no masked ball or birth night assembly ever occasioned more entertainment and delight than did this excursion to our rustic theatre.

We set off at half past four, for the children would not cease teizing us till we were on foot; and having arrived a full hour too soon, took possession of the front bench, which in this play house might be denominated the stage boxes, being the most convenient place in the barn for seeing the performance.

We had not been long seated, before several gentlemen entered, the most of whom by their dress appeared to be officers. Miss Patty informed me they belonged

belonged to a company at present quartered in the village; but as the place was but indifferently lighted up it was not easy immediately to distinguish their faces.

They had not engaged my attention above a few moments, when my companion, Miss Patty, asked me in a whisper if I did not think that gentleman in the dark coloured coat, the handsomest young man I had ever seen; and turning to where she pointed, I beheld Mr. Roatsley leaning against one of the side scenes, engaged in conversation with some gentlemen.

You may easily imagine I was in a tremor; and I had not an instant given me to compose or recollect myself, when I perceived Mr. Bradshaw approach him, and gently pulling him by the arm, whisper something in his ear, which made him at once change colour and glance his eyes with eagerness around the house.

Captain



Captain Bradshaw just then made me a respectful bow; and his friend taking the reference of his look, instantly followed his example, with an expression in his countenance of satisfaction and delight which I fear almost conveyed equal pleasure into mine. He came directly up to me, and paid me his compliments with a politeness not however unmixed with confusion; while on my part, the recollection of Mrs. Hindon's letter, the obligation for which my avowed acknowledgements were due, and the secret humiliating benefit I knew he had intended to bestow, threw an awkwardness and constraint over my reception of him which I could not for some time either conquer or conceal.

Happily Mr. Howard immediately joined us; and by addressing himself to Roastley, gave me a momentary relief. Perceiving I seemed at a loss, he partly comprehended the cause; and kindly  
paved



paved the way for my acknowledgments by entering at once on the subject. I did myself the pleasure of writing to you, Mr. Roatsley, said he, some time ago, but as I have not been favoured with an answer——

I should not have failed most certainly in seizing the earliest opportunity of acknowledging any letter of your's, returned he, had I been conscious of the favour; but I have been making a little excursion of late, and having no fixed abode, I suppose they knew not where to forward my letters, as I was so negligent as to leave no orders about them.

Nay, Sir, had you really been guilty of any omission, no apology was necessary to me: for I acted but as amanuensis to my fair sister: and my letter was only intended to express her acknowledgments added to my own, for the polite attention with which you have interested yourself in her affairs.

A deep

A deep blush overspread the countenance of Mr. Roatsley at this speech, and an embarrassment took possession of his features little inferior to my own when I added, that he must have concluded me extremely ungrateful to have so long deferred returning my very sincere thanks, for an obligation which should always induce me to consider myself as particularly indebted to him.

His confusion was now augmented; and bowing, he stammered not a little while he repeated—what pleasure he must receive—how delighted he must be—and how happy he should think himself to be of the smallest service to Miss Seymour.

He then turned to address himself to Mr. Bradshaw as if anxious to change the subject; and just at that instant perceiving my sister, for whom he had not even enquired, he left me to pay his compliments to her; but soon returning,

he entered immediately on a new topic, enquired how I had amused myself in the country during the winter, asked if I could really leave town at that gay season without the slightest regret, and placed himself next me, where there happened fortunately to be a vacant seat. His late confusion now gave way to a gaiety and animation which convinced me that the ceremony of distant and occasional meetings had not hitherto allowed of that easy intimacy between us which develops without constraint or disguise the real temper of mind. My conscious feelings had always thrown a reserve over my own manner to Mr. Roatsley, which could not fail to affect his; but the unexpected satisfaction of this sudden rencontre had given to both a flow of spirits that would not be restrained, and which while it wholly banished Lady Elizabeth Sedley from my recollection presented Roatsley in a point of  
of

of view entirely new and still more insinuating. I had before admired him as a character of real and unassuming dignity. The amiable softness of his address had charmed me; and all I saw, and all I heard of his disposition, (however combated at times by pique and displeasure) had served but to augment my esteem. I had considered him as rather of a grave turn of mind: this evening however, the early part of it at least, fully satisfied me of my error. He was not merely in good spirits, but lively and animated beyond measure, and his friend Captain Bradshaw, who joined us, and who really is a very agreeable young man, added to the gaiety and life of the party.

The commencement of the play, which by the way was King Lear, put a period for a short time to this general chat. But the performance was so miserable, that it was impossible to pay attention to it, and Mr. Roatsley again addressed himself in

conversation to me. He soon recurred to my leaving town, and talked of it with the most flattering regret. I shall not do you the injustice to suppose, said he, that possessing in yourself those never failing resources which give defiance to vapours and ennui, you could either endure much regret on leaving the mere amusements of the town, or suffer from vacancy or languor on returning to the country; but early in March, every thing around is so bleak, and the communication between one neighbour and another so often impeded by bad roads or bad weather, that a comfortable, agreeable society, in which (after all our various ways of pursuing pleasure), it must be confessed our first enjoyment consists, is less practicable in the country than in town; besides most people are of that opinion, and the country of course must have been quite deserted when you arrived in it.

Yes,



Yes, answered I; but when I retired to Hubert Hill I was so singularly situated as to carry along with me the only friends to whom, at least in this part of the world, I can lay claim, and they were such as must have enlivened and endeared the most dismal and uncomfortable spot.

After such a declaration, I must not presume to enquire of whom this enviable party consisted.

You safely may, said I, since my brother and sister constituted the whole.

And is your heart, Miss Seymour, so entirely engrossed by these friends, amiable and deserving as they are, that no place is left in it for the numbers who must have mourned your absence.

When I left London, said I with a sudden warmth, which the recollection of our forlorn situation forcibly excited, it contained not one human soul, who, had they been certain they should have

beheld me no more, would have endured one moment's regret.

The idea was so melancholy, that a tear started into my eye, not I'm afraid unseen by Roatsley, for he instantly replied—Ah! Miss Seymour, that is wholly and utterly impossible. Those who are formed by nature for charming their own sex and enchanting our's, cannot fail of converting into friends and admirers all blest with the happiness of their acquaintance.

This compliment, pronounced in a voice of mixed eagerness and softness, could not fail to confuse me: and unable to make a proper reply, or to disclaim a compliment much too flattering even for acknowledgement, I could only reply with much hesitation—oh! Mr. Roatsley, how can you possibly imagine—besides you know I am quite a stranger in England.

Loveliness, continued he in the same strain,

strain, is an object too interesting to mankind in general to prove a stranger in any quarter of the globe. Where there are souls to feel its influence, it must be felt with force and energy irresistible.

To this an answer was still more impossible and I did not attempt it. Finding I was silent—I have the pleasure of considering myself, said he, after a pause, as your first English acquaintance. Will you not then allow me the inexpressible happiness of a place in this envied list of your friends. Be assured I shall yield to none in the interest I hold in your welfare.

The warmth of his expressions, and still more the eagerness of his countenance, covered me with blushes, and I could only reply by a slight bow of acknowledgement. I took courage at length to add, that the obligations I owed him sufficiently proved his claim to be considered in that light.

This conversation naturally led him, with a gaiety that soon banished my conscious confusion, to mention the circumstances of our first meeting, from which, by an easy transition, he proceeded to talk upon many interesting topics. In the course of this discourse, I was not a little surprized to hear him mention Lord Belmont's name more than once with the most unconscious ingenuousness, and found myself still more bewildered when I perceived he seemed even desirous of drawing from me every circumstance relating to my situation abroad that he could contrive, without an appearance of impertinent curiosity, to obtain.

Various were the particulars into which he had the address, though with the utmost politeness, to penetrate. I was astonished and confounded by his behaviour, yet I still remained convinced that his ignorance was feigned: and while I answered



swered simply and naturally to all his enquiries, pride made me disdain to force him to an explanation, which must detect his duplicity, and cover him with confusion.

At length—your accent is so little defective Miss Seymour, said he, that it is difficult for me to believe you never were in England till now.

I left it when so very young, replied I, that I have not the most distant recollection of ever having been in it.

Having quitted it so very early, is equivalent to your never having been in it. But I always understood, Miss Seymour, that France had had the honour of your birth.

Astonished, and entirely off my guard at this speech, I involuntarily exclaimed—good heavens! Mr. Roatsley, how can you say so? Is it possible you can affect this ignorance.

Ignorance! repeated he. Little as I



have had the happiness of enjoying your company, and short as has been the period of our acquaintance, it is not surprising that I should be ignorant of this as well as of a thousand other circumstances into which I have never had the presumption to enquire, however anxious my desire of information has been.

Are you indeed serious, cried I; for inexplicable as it appeared, I now perceived that all was as yet a secret to him.

Never more so than at this moment. But why should it astonish you so much? is it not the natural consequence of—

Because, cried I, interrupting him, I have believed till this instant that you were as perfectly well informed of every circumstance of my birth and education as the most intimate of my friends can be, or as I myself am.

My ignorance, be assured, answered he, has resulted neither from want of anxiety nor want of exertion to obtain information;

information; but simply that from your recent arrival in this country your circle of acquaintance was not extensive, and none seemed more in the secret than myself: Miss Seymour cannot suppose that where she appeared she could remain disregarded and unnoticed. Various were the accounts relating to her that reached my ears; but they were uniformly vague and unsatisfactory, and I am convinced void of foundation. Since however the fate of my enquiries appears to you so extraordinary, I hope you will not think my earnest request of an explanation too presuming. Under the happy title just now granted me may I dare to venture on such a demand?

Amazement, satisfaction, and a variety of other emotions, at once so powerfully assailed me, that for a few moments I could not articulate; and grew so suddenly pale, that Roatsley hastily applied to Miss Patty for her smelling bottle; who,

who, extremely frightened, was about to have alarmed my sister, and the rest of the party, had I not recollected myself, and assured her my indisposition was slight and already gone off. To any other person my countenance might have discovered that my spirits were more affected than my health; but engrossed with the novelty of the performance, which had now advanced to the beginning of the second act, my young companion had not given the slightest attention to our conversation, and having been often told I suppose that fine ladies were vapourish and hysterical, did not seem either suspicious or surprised.

Far otherwise were the conclusions of Mr. Roatsley. Shocked and confounded, he began to apprehend a mystery, to unravel which he had not received the slightest hint or assistance. I am in the agonies of the most painful suspense, said he after a pause: but since the subject is  
so

so distressing, I am contented nay even eager to remain in ignorance.

You shall be informed of every thing you may desire to know, said I, when I found myself a little recovered; but at present all explanation is impossible. A few words will not suffice; and even if they should, I am incapable myself of entering on the subject.

From whom then, will you allow me to expect it?

From my brother, Mr. Howard. He will tell you all.

*All!* repeated he, still more confounded. The solemnity of the phrase almost alarms me.

The entrance of a large party of gentlemen and ladies just at this instant created a noise and bustle which carried our eyes to the door. Good God! exclaimed Roatsley in a tone of vexation; and I instantly discovered Lady Marry Lawrance, her niece Lady Elizabeth,



beth, Miss Dudley, and in short the whole party at Holtenham, (Lady Linrose and Miss Lucy Dudley excepted) escorted by Sir Edward Sudbury and several other young men.

As we had taken possession of the front bench, seats for so many people occasioned some confusion. That on which we were placed could not contain above one half of the ladies, it being already more than half filled; and though the one behind was almost empty, having been purposely kept for the more fashionable part of the audience, they seemed to disdain occupying it, and stood some time very civilly expressing their disappointment aloud with the expectation that our party would rise and give them place.

This act of politeness, however, we had no sort of intention of performing. Indeed, for myself, the haughty presumption of their behaviour would have deterred



deterred me from taking any steps towards their accommodation ; but at present the unexpected appearance of Lady Elizabeth, who for an hour before had not once obtruded on my mind, now wholly banished that pleasing satisfaction and inward complacency which the knowledge that Roatsley had not yet deserted us diffused over my feelings. I was sunk and dispirited, and not in the least disposed to be civil and attentive to any of this fashionable set, Lady Mary excepted, who came up to my sister, and addressed us with her usual good breeding and affability.

Miss Dudley, a few minutes after she entered, perceiving her brother, who had risen to pay his respects to the ladies, immediately called out—Lord brother, when did you arrive in this part of the world ?

Only last night, returned he. I came to spend a few days with Bradshaw at his quarters,

quarters, and he brought me hither for the purpose of encouraging these poor people. I did not expect to find so much good company, nor to meet with so many of my friends.

Nay, answered she, we never should have thought of coming to this poor little place, which must be a sad, stupid affair, but it seems the man who dignifies himself with the title of manager prayed Lady Mary so hard to patronize them, that out of mere compassion she bespoke the play, and insisted we should all attend her.

Lady Elizabeth just then advancing, exclaimed in a tone of impatience loud enough to be heard all over the house—Lard, only think of these people having taken our places; and presently perceiving me—how do you do, Miss Seymour? cried she with a careless air; and without waiting a reply, continued in my  
hearing

hearing to express her wonder, *what the people could mean.*

Her harangue was all at once interrupted by the unexpected sight of Mr. Roatsley, who came forward to pay her his compliments. I watched what effect this sudden meeting might produce in the countenances of both, and remarked that they mutually reddened extremely at the rencontre; but while Roatsley addressed himself to her with a respectful but distant air, her manner to him appeared to betray an over acted display of dignity and reserve. She recovered her little embarrassment very speedily however; for she immediately recurred to her scornful expressions of surprise, and repeated her complaints to him, who politely offered her the place he had just quitted by me.

No, cried she carelessly, I can't be divided from my party.

Had

Had your Ladyship engaged places ?  
said he.

O Lord, no. How should one think of such a thing in such a place as this. But when the people came to solicit us to go, they told us the first bench should be reserved for any people of fashion who might take it into their heads to come, and behold all the parsons wives and daughters I believe in the county have assembled to take possession of the only tolerable places in the barn.

Roatsley looked by no means pleased at this rude speech, which he knew I could not but overhear, and replied with quickness—But as your Ladyship can't suppose any of the ladies will give up their seats, I would advise you to accept of mine.

Mr. Howard and the good Doctor having by this time risen to accommodate the company, and placed some of the children behind, room was at length  
made



made for them; and by this arrangement Roatsley was once more placed next me with Lady Elizabeth on his other hand.

Her Ladyship chose not to favour me with any further notice during the remainder of the evening; and Miss Dudley, who did not even afford me the civility of a distant bow, sat with her eyes fixed on the spot where her brother was placed, whom she examined with an aspect of such ill humour and displeasure, every time he addressed himself to me, that I felt beyond measure uneasy.

She had not the smallest reason, however, to dread or even to suspect any assiduity on his part towards me; for his behaviour was now totally changed. He looked grave, thoughtful, and absorbed. The little he said was forced and constrained; and his attentions were divided with the most scrupulous exactness equally between Lady Elizabeth and myself.

Her



Her admirer, or rather her attendant, Sir Edward, under pretence of avoiding to crowd her, insisted on relinquishing a place her Ladyship had procured him immediately behind her, and teized me not a little, (for it must be owned I was not in the best humour) by standing at my side with his usual sollicitude, and entering into conversation with me. I was less than ever in a mood for listening to him, particularly as I observed that Roatsley lent an attentive ear to all that passed between us; the purport of which consisted in much anxiety in regard to my accident, and at length in an explicit but diffident request that I would allow him the honour of visiting me at Hubert Hill, and would favour him with an introduction to Mr. Howard, whom he said he had never been so fortunate as to meet at Mrs. Hindon's.

The recollection of his behaviour on a certain occasion, rendered a refusal, or  
even

even an evasion of this demand, impossible, though the unbounded satisfaction he testified on my compliance, made me speedily apprehend that I ought not to have consented, and induced me to fear I had granted more than I designed by the introduction.

He and Mr. Roatsley seemed intimately acquainted. Between the acts they joined each other, and continued in earnest conversation; and from the gravity of the one countenance and the too apparent exultation of the other, I could not avoid suspecting that Sir Edward was confessing his sanguine expectations to his friend. You smile at my vanity, Sophia; but the attentions of this young man are so pointed and undisguised, that they attract universal observation wherever I meet him; though my manner (uniformly as reserved as good breeding will allow it to be) testifies as plainly as words

words almost could do, how little I am gratified by his notice.

Lady Elizabeth, deprived of the devoirs of one admirer, and not much soothed by the cold politeness of another, lavished all her smiles, good humour, and condescension, upon a young man of a very singular appearance, who sat on her left hand, and who seemed so entirely to atone for the neglect of the others, that I perceived her supposed partiality to Sir Edward was merely the indiscriminate love of flattery and admiration. Her present lover (for such his assiduities evidently confessed him to be) I was informed possessed a splendid fortune, and was of distinguished rank, but his name I have forgot. He was dressed in the stile of a common groom or horse jockey, and his hair, cut short behind, hung about his ears with a negligence which betrayed not only disrespect for the company, but a total disregard both  
of

of cleanliness and propriety; yet an air of conscious consequence, and a very handsome figure, which he tried in vain to disguise, betrayed his latent importance. He seemed possessed of exuberant spirits; for his Lordship and Lady Elizabeth, by their talking and laughing, gave great offence and occasioned much disturbance to the rustic part of the audience, who were not so refined as to despise the performance, but on the contrary enjoyed it with all the relish of novelty.

The actors indeed were so miserably bad, that the whole exhibition had infinitely more the appearance of the comic than of the Tragic Muse; and attending to it was so little interesting, and in my situation of mind so impossible, that I ought not to blame her Ladyship for endeavouring to draw amusement from another channel, especially as I myself followed her example most part of the evening;



evening: but there was an unfeeling and unpardonable indelicacy in testifying with so little disguise the ridicule which the poor people who were labouring for our amusement excited, and the bursts of ungoverned laughter, and severe raillery, that reached their ears from this polite party, was a mortification in which I would not for worlds have joined. I had the satisfaction of perceiving that Roatsley was equally shocked at their behaviour: and not only applauded wherever any particular expectation of approbation was betrayed, but engaged all the gentlemen round him to drown, by every testimony of satisfaction, the hissing with which Lady Elizabeth's gay admirer frequently assailed the performers.

All particular conversation was at an end between Roatsley and me from the moment of Lady Elizabeth's appearance; and that which had preceded her entrance, by perplexing and engrossing us,  
had.



had mutually unfitted us for discoursing on those little trifles that usually present themselves as topics of general discussion. He seemed so evidently oppressed with something that lay uneasily on his mind, that I could not possibly conclude mere curiosity to have excited an impression so apparently unfurmountable; and soothed and gratified as I had been in the beginning of the evening, I soon began to suspect that he regarded with pain and displeasure the coquetry of Lady Elizabeth's behaviour. He often fixed his eyes upon her for some moments together with a look of scrutiny and investigation, seemed to watch every word and movement that escaped her, and though he seldom addressed himself to her, to *me* he attended still less. He appeared indeed wholly absorbed by his own reflections; and scarce could I trace the same insinuating manner, which but

one half hour before had delighted me so much.

The pain of this observation, which strengthened every moment, convinced me I had been unconsciously deluding myself with false and chimerical hopes. If Lady Elizabeth was indifferent to him, why did her conduct so evidently affect and displease him; if his chains were heavy and his heart unconcerned, her present conduct was precisely what he ought to have desired and enjoyed; and if his eager professions of regard and friendship for me were as warm and potent as I wished them, whence came this sudden languor and reserve, when by an act of confidence I was about to give him a proof of my esteem.

There was but one way of solving these inconsistencies, and it was blindness not to perceive it: involved in an engagement, with the splendid advantages of which probably he was himself dazzled,

dazzled, he had resolved to pursue the path so anxiously pointed out to him by his family, while the folly and insipidity of the object of his vows, without operating so violently as to deter him from his purpose, shocked his feelings and opened his eyes to the dangers of fulfilling it.

These reflections only served to shew me that redoubled exertions were required to fortify my mind against the weakness of my heart; and I began to form a secret plan of mental rigour which I flattered myself must in time restore the tranquillity I had lost.

Sufficient time was given me for these good resolutions; for Sir Edward on the one hand had been called away by Mr. Bradshaw, and Roatsley on the other preserved his determined silence so resolutely, that I had no apprehension of any interruption. The return of the former, however, at length forced me to

give a constrained attention to his conversation; but finding that to affect a gaiety foreign to my feelings was beyond measure irksome and insupportable in my present frame of mind, yet conscious I could not too soon drive from my thoughts a crowd of flattering retrospections, which sometimes for an instant banished my despondency and occasioned a new conflict, I endeavoured, as an escape both from Sir Edward and myself, to lend an ear to the play, the pathetic beauties of which not even the miserable deficiencies of the performers could wholly obscure.

The player who appeared in the character of Gloster, happened to be in fact blind; a circumstance which, as his voice was good and his action much superior to that of his companions, rendered him an interesting and most melancholy object. In the fourth act, when the unexpected meeting between Gloster  
and



and his son takes place, the pathos and feeling with which the unhappy father exclaimed—

———Oh dear son Edgar!

The food of thy abused father's wrath!

Might I but live to *see* thee in my *touch*

I'd say I had eyes again—

affected me so poignantly, that I could not command my tears. In this however I was not singular; for I perceived Roatsley equally softened: nothing indeed could be more mournful than the scene before us, nor could any sound have appeared more inhuman than a loud and childish fit of laughter, which just at that instant burst from Lady Elizabeth. Good heavens! cried she to her admirer, if the people a'nt crying. Nay that is too ridiculous indeed. Pray do look, Mr. Roatsley, turning to him—pray for God's sake observe the tears; how soft and pretty all this is.

He gave her no reply; but regarding



me for a moment, who on this occasion was the particular object of her observation and ridicule, a sigh escaped him that seemed to be vented from the heart, and he again set himself to listen to the play with the anxiety of a person who wished to avoid all interruption.

When all was concluded, Mr. Bradshaw came up and enquired how I had been entertained. The performance on the whole, said he, was such as might have been expected, but that little stroke of Gloster's was truly pathetic.

Lady Elizabeth, who did not distinctly hear what he said, chose to join in the conversation though she continued to preserve towards me the same contemptuous disregard, and demanded of what he was talking?

I was mentioning to Miss Seymour, cried he, the circumstance of the poor fellow who played Gloster.

Oh

Oh yes! cried she, inconsiderately, I never laughed so much in my life.

It is an excellent jest to the poor blind devil, returned he sarcastically, to be deprived of sight; and being constrained in that dismal state to make such exertions for subsistence is a still better one.

Lord I don't mean so, for that certainly must be quite dreadful to be sure; only I was vastly amused seeing the people pretend to cry, when undoubtedly the whole affair was more like a farce than any thing else.

There is Roatsley, returned Mr. Bradshaw, who appears as much dejected as if he had been weeping the tender woes of Belvidera when performed by the inimitable Mrs. Siddons, and Miss Seymour too looks not only as if she had been crying, but as if she could cry for an hour to come.

I merely look as if I was fatigued and half asleep, cried I.

How unfortunate must I be in my choice of topics, answered he with a smile; for twice have I endured the mortification of learning from Miss Seymour's lips that I had set her asleep. Pray are *you* half asleep too, cried he, turning to Roatsley, are *you* infected with Miss Seymour's lethargic disorder. Indeed if I may be allowed (lowering his voice) to judge from appearances, I should pronounce you affected with similar symptoms.

This speech, pronounced with an expression of the most cruel archness, and of which I did not lose a syllable, hurt me severely. The most painful confusion dyed my cheeks, and I had not courage for some moments to look up, lest I should encounter the eyes of Roatsley; but I believe he was equally confounded and embarrassed, for he made no answer, and a short silence succeeded, which was beyond measure awkward and distressing.

This

This was soon interrupted by Bradshaw, who appeared rather to have enjoyed than regretted the mutual confusion he had occasioned. Miss Seymour, cried he, I was extremely sorry I was obliged to leave Holtenham without having the happiness of again seeing you: I wished much to enquire how you had rested, and longed particularly to know of you if you had discovered the solution of the enigma I gave you to unriddle.

I have even forgot that you gave me any enigma to solve, said I; and as I raised my eyes to answer him with as much indifference as I could assume, I perceived Roatsley's eyes were fixed on my face with an expression of earnest penetration that wholly disconcerted me; happily, however, my sister, from whom by the accidental change of places I had been separated just then joined us; and some previous consultation in regard to



to our mode of departure relieved me from further persecution.

The evening, though a little cool, was pleasant, and walking, had I been able for it, was the method of travelling I should have preferred; but my sister, who in her rural situation retains the embers of latent vanity, was much provoked by the contempt and haughty insolence with which our humble party had been treated by the proud train from Holtenham, and was not a little mortified at the idea of being obliged to find her way through a crowd of powdered footmen and magnificent equipages to go home on foot with the parson and his wife; while this fashionable company were leaving the rustic theatre with as much eclat and parade as had attended their entrance, followed by all the gay male part of the audience. She therefore determined to remain till the last, and whisperingly informed me of the reason;



reason; though Mr. Howard and the good Doctor, who were far from suspecting this plan, urged her to be gone, as it began to grow late and there was no apparent reason for delay.

Poor Fanny, ashamed to confess this spark of secret pride, which would have appeared wholly incomprehensible to the one and perhaps rather absurd to the other, was put to great difficulties in order to compleat her project; but she was resolved to save herself this little humiliation if possible. Mrs. Heathcote's care for herself and children, gave her likewise much pain. The good woman wrapt them all carefully up in large thick cloaks and handkerchiefs brought for the purpose, till they exactly resembled Russian boors in the prints of travellers; and besought Fanny in a voice loud enough to be heard all over the house, to make herself warm, for *walking home* in the *night air* was extremely  
apt

apt to give people colds; and indeed Mrs. Howard, though this cloak is old and a little worn out, it is thick and comfortable, and I wish you would allow me to wrap it round you.

All this was the more severe on poor Fanny's irritable feelings, as Lady Mary's carriage, which had occasioned her some little delay, just then being announced, her Ladyship in passing stopped to bid her good night; and Lady Elizabeth following, escorted by her gay admirer, looked with a smile of ridicule but half suppressed, at the appearance of our companions.

Roatsley, who had been called away by his sister, had returned but a moment before; but perceiving Lady Mary unattended, again left me to conduct her to her carriage, having first besought the honour of seeing me to mine, and requested that I would not depart till his return. This circumstance rendered me  
fully

fully as anxious as my sister to delay our going, while I was no less ashamed to acknowledge the cause.

My dear, cried Mr. Howard to Fanny on coming up to us, for heavens sake let us be gone. We shall lose the advantage of the moon if we are not directly on foot. It is already on its decline.

I was silent; and she only replied by saying we should go presently.

Unconscious of our secret views, he could only attribute to a childish desire of outstaying the company, our unwillingness to depart, and insisted on setting off immediately with me, leaving his wife under the care of the good parson, with whose family she was to walk home.

My sister, much pleased with this plan, which left her motions in her own power, urged me to go; and severe as it was to leave the house before Roatsley's return, before we had finally adjusted at what time and in what place he was to receive

receive the communication so much desired, I was absolutely constrained to allow Sir Edward to lead me to the little carriage. Had I been perfectly unconscious of any secret interest beyond that anxiety which I felt in common with my sister to be on terms of intimacy with a relation so amiable, I should undoubtedly have acquainted Mr. Howard with my wish to remain, and acknowledged the cause; but the particulars were too long for immediate discussion at that moment, and on that spot, where Sir Edward never for an instant left my side: afraid therefore to discover an eagerness too keen, especially before Mr. Bradshaw, of whose animadversions I was extremely apprehensive, I permitted Mr. Howard in silence to place himself by me and we drove off.

On stepping in, I perceived by the glare of the flambeaux Roatsley in earnest conversation with Lady Elizabeth at the window



window of Lady Mary's carriage, and he still stood in the same place when I lost sight of him.

When we got home, Fanny being longer in making her appearance than we expected, Mr. Howard grew at length uneasy, and went himself to see after the walking party. Finding myself alone, I threw myself on a chair, and giving way to a train of reflexions which alternately soothed and tormented me, I indulged unconsciously in a fit of musing which softened rather than relieved me.

But I hastily conclude this letter, having an immediate opportunity of sending it to my Sophia.

Adieu.

H. SEYMOUR.

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